THE Nation.

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Exchange

Boycott Israel?

Amherst, Mass.

I strongly oppose Naomi Klein's proposal to begin boycotts and divestment initiatives against Israel, similar to the approach used against South Africa in the apartheid era ["Lookout," Jan. 26]. Klein anticipates four objections to her proposal and offers responses. But her list ignores the most important and obvious objection: it is entirely one-sided both in blaming Israel for the horrible cycle of violence in the region and in meting out punishment.

I agree entirely that the Israeli occupation is brutal. But Hamas is also brutal. To date, the only thing preventing Hamas from being less lethal than Israel in the damage it inflicts is its limited resources. Hamas is deliberately firing rockets into Israel with the aim of killing and terrorizing civilians. Should Iran, for example, succeed in supplying Hamas with more effective weapons, Hamas will become more successful in killing and terrorizing Israeli citizens. Rockets are beginning to land only twenty miles south of Tel Aviv.

The toll on Palestinian civilians of the current Israeli attack on Gaza is horrible. But let's also recognize that Hamas is deliberately using civilians as human shields. The bomb that hit the home of Hamas leader Nazar Rayyan in Jabaliya tragically killed his wives and children as well as himself. Why was Rayyan exposing his family to such danger?

I agree with Klein that economic levers probably have the best chance of dramatically shifting the status quo (even while, given the history and emotions involved, economic initiatives could never offer a sufficient solution on their own). But instead of a one-sided boycott to punish Israel, why not pursue a positive agenda of economic development that would benefit both sides? Consider, for example, a development aid package on the order of $10 billion, spread over two to four years, with funds supplied on an equitable basis from the United States, the European Union and the Arab oil-exporting countries. This amount would be enough to: (1) undertake a massive infrastructure investment and job creation program in Gaza and the West Bank to help create an economically viable Palestinian state; and (2) comfortably resettle the roughly half-million Israelis now living in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem and turn over these communities and homes to Palestinians. This second initiative would entail a large-scale home-building, community infrastructure and job-creation program in Israel, perhaps concentrated in the less well-developed northern and southern regions.

The amount of money I'm suggesting seems large, of course. But $10 billion is only about 7 percent of what the United States spent in Iraq in 2007 and 5 percent of Saudi Arabia's $194 billion in oil revenues in 2008. In short, the amount is modest in comparison with the opportunities it will create to contribute to an equitable and lasting peace in the region.

Robert Pollin, *co-director,*
Political Economy Research Institute
University of Massachusetts

Tel Aviv; Haifa

Thank you, Naomi Klein, for your call for Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions. It is indeed time for such an international campaign. Your call is a small, bright light in the dark, murderous time of the latest Israeli assault on defenseless Palestinians. Those of us in Israel who struggle against Israeli apartheid and other crimes feel that this is much needed assistance for our efforts. It is important to recognize that sanctions against Israel are directed toward Israel's brutal policies rather than its people. They seem to be the only road open for those who would like to see peace prevail in the Middle East.

Rachel Giora, Anat Mata,
Kobi Snitz

Suburban Maryland

The January 26 editorial by Roane Carey and columns by Alexander Cockburn and Naomi Klein are a unique illustration of professional courage that

(continued on page 24)

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The Nation.
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Renewing America

In the first minutes of his presidency, Barack Obama laid out a candid assessment of our current crisis. "Our economy," he said at the start of his inaugural address, "is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age." He pledged "action—bold and swift" to create new jobs, a new national infrastructure, a new energy plan, a new healthcare system, renewed schools and universities. In an unmistakable message to antigovernment fiscal conservatives, he warned those "cynics" who "question the scale of our ambitions" that failure of nerve at this crucial moment is not an option and that we must aspire to nothing less than "remaking America."

EDITORIAL

It was a forceful start to the first hundred days of Obama's administration, a clear sign that a new era—based on equal measures of realism, grit and hope—had begun. But nations are not remade in oratory alone, and the next ninety-nine days will be a decisive test of the administration's resolve and vision. It is therefore disappointing that the economic stimulus package proposed by Obama and Congressional Democrats is only half there.

At $825 billion, it is larger than proposals discussed as recently as the new year, but it is still short of the more than $1 trillion leading economists say should be the floor—not the ceiling—of any stimulus plan. It favors spending over tax cuts by a 2-to-1 margin, but the scale of tax cuts ($275 billion) still concedes too much to the supply-side crowd. It provides much-needed relief to states crushed by shortfalls in Medicaid, education and unemployment benefits funding; but even more of this spending—which circulates more immediately into the economy than tax rebates—is needed. It contains innovative projects to develop a smart electricity grid and green technologies, to weatherize homes and modernize schools and healthcare information systems. But the plan still invests too little in the physical and social infrastructure development that will build the economy's long-term productivity. In many areas it gives priority to traditional spending projects over newer, greener investments. It devotes, for example, $30 billion to build highways but only $10 billion to mass transit, when Chicago alone has more than $7 billion in "shovel-ready" transit projects waiting in the wings. In short, the economic stimulus package is not big enough, bold enough or forward-looking enough to meet the challenges Obama has identified.

The cost of political expediency may be diminished effectiveness. By putting forth a stimulus package intended to garner broad bipartisan support—Obama's aides have said that they hope to get eighty votes in the Senate, far more than required for a simple majority or a filibuster-proof margin—the administration is missing some proven solutions. A recovery plan could, for example, increase Social Security payments, which would help an aging and increasingly impoverished population. It could beef up welfare—the plan calls for a meager $2.5 billion temporary boost—and create a jobs program for out-of-work Americans. It could further scale up Medicaid payments and broaden eligibility—laying the groundwork for universal healthcare. And as part of its restructuring of TARP II, it could require mandatory renegotiations of mortgages and create a federal housing trust to keep people in their homes. Instead, the next round of TARP funding continues to subsidize banks and does little to reform the financial system. At another time of economic crisis in our history, Roosevelt's New Deal aspired to provide relief, recovery *and* reform; Obama's first hundred days must do no less.

Inside

Exchange

2 Boycott Israel?
ROBERT POLLIN, OUR READERS AND NAOMI KLEIN

Editorials & Comment

3 Renewing America

4 A Matter of Justice

5 Noted

6 Missing Howard Dean

6 100 Days
'I Saw My People'
CHRISTOPHER HAYES

7 Seeking Obama's Center
VICTOR NAVASKY

8 Winning & Losing in Gaza
RICHARD FALK

Columns

6 Deadline Poet
'Bailout Is a No-Strings Windfall to Bankers, If Not to Borrowers'
—*New York Times*
CALVIN TRILLIN

9 Beat the Devil
Hail Caesar!
ALEXANDER COCKBURN

10 Subject to Debate
Stimulating Reading
KATHA POLLITT

Articles

11 Foreclosure Fightback
Activists demand a foreclosure freeze, renegotiated loans and a bailout for all.
BEN EHRENREICH

14 A House-Poor Nation
ADAM DOSTER

16 Hope for the Homeless?
With homeless rates at record highs, America needs a bold new housing policy.
PATRICK MARKEE AND LIZZY RATNER

18 Obama and the Return of the Real
JONATHAN SCHELL

22 A Revolution in Spirit
The economic crisis requires a radical response—not revved-up consumerism.
BENJAMIN R. BARBER

Books & the Arts

25 Adventures in Editing: A Memoir
TED SOLOTAROFF

28 Clair de Lune (POEM)
TIMOTHY DONNELLY

34 THEATER: American Buffalo, Speed-the-Plow
ALISA SOLOMON

COVER DESIGN BY GENE CASE & STEPHEN KLING/ AVENGING ANGELS; ILLUSTRATIONS BY TIM ROBINSON

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NEWS & ANALYSIS

Victor Navasky: Inaugural journey

Katrina vanden Heuvel: A new beginning

Leslie Savan: Tearing up, together

Eric Alterman: Altercation blog

SLIDE SHOW

Inaugural images

FROM THE ARCHIVE

FDR's 100 Days

NATION CALENDAR

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A Matter of Justice

Barack Obama hit many grace notes in his race for the presidency. But one statement he made on the eve of his inaugural sounded off-key to Americans who have embraced the president's campaign trail promise that he would give the nation "a president who has taught the Constitution and believes in the Constitution and will obey the Constitution of the United States of America."

EDITORIAL

It is respect for the Constitution—not partisanship or personal dislike of George W. Bush, Dick Cheney and their acolytes—that has led to calls for accountability, in which the high crimes and misdemeanors of the former administration are assessed and addressed. Yet when pressed on the issue by ABC's George Stephanopoulos, Obama again returned to the theme that "my orientation's going to be to move forward." Asked whether he would support the appointment of a special prosecutor to "independently investigate the greatest crimes of the Bush administration, including torture and warrantless wiretapping," Obama replied that "my general belief is that when it comes to national security, what we have to focus on is getting things right in the future, as opposed to looking at what we got wrong in the past."

A few days later, at his Senate Judiciary Committee confirmation hearing, Eric Holder, Obama's nominee for attorney general, responded to a similar question by saying, "No one is above the law.… We will follow the evidence, the facts, the law, and let that take us where it should, but I think President-elect Obama has said it well. We don't want to criminalize policy differences that might exist." The problem with Obama's statement, and even more so with Holder's, is that it dismisses legitimate demands for accountability as mere partisan or ideological maneuvers that will detract from the serious business at hand for a new administration.

In fact, the opposite is true. Holding accountable those who promote the use of torture—in defiance of the Geneva Conventions and the Eighth Amendment's bar on cruel and unusual punishment—is not a criminalization of policy differences. It is a matter of justice. Holding accountable those who approve the warrantless wiretapping of American citizens' phone calls and e-mails—in defiance of settled law and the Fourth Amendment to the Constitution's guarantee of privacy—is not a criminalization of policy differences. It is a matter of bringing lawbreakers to justice. Holding accountable those who lied to Congress and the American people about the alleged need to wage an illegal and unnecessary war on Iraq—in defiance of our system of checks and balances and without a constitutionally required declaration of war—is not a criminalization of policy differences. It is a signal to future commanders in chief that they cannot wage wars of whim.

To speak of "criminalizing" policy differences is to miss the point of the oath that presidents and their appointees, as well as members of Congress, take to protect and defend the Constitution. Getting to the bottom of the wrongdoing that was so widespread and blatant during the Bush years would not be a diversion; it would renew the separation of powers and reestablish the executive branch as an equal—not dominant and

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Noted.

SEEGER SINGS: The tangible evidence that the change **Barack Obama** promised had indeed arrived in Washington came two days before the president was inaugurated, when **Pete Seeger** stepped off the blacklist to which some would still consign him and serenaded Obama. Seeger, the unrepentant radical who once directed the song "Dear Mr. President" to **Franklin Roosevelt**, still gets redbaited now and again. But the 89-year-old singer has outlasted the members of Congress who called him before the **House Un-American Activities Committee** (where, famously, he asserted his freedom-of-association right to refuse to answer questions about the **Communist Party**) and the entertainment industry executives who refused him microphones for decades.

It helped that Seeger appeared with a kid named **Bruce Springsteen** and that the song they sang, **Woody Guthrie**'s "This Land Is Your Land," is darn near the progressive national anthem. But for all the talk of Obama's centrist inclinations and cautious messaging, he began his inaugural celebration by singing and clapping along with an old lefty who remembered Depression-era verses of the song that took a class-conscious swipe at those whose Private Property signs turned away union organizers, hobos and banjo players. JOHN NICHOLS

FREE THE ALAMO: San Antonio may become the first major US city in which only those who can afford to pay for the right to march can exercise it. Members of the **San Antonio Free Speech Coalition** (SAFSC), a broad-based and fast-growing alliance of local groups, are organizing against a parade ordinance passed by the mayor and city council in November 2007 that would require permitted protesters to pay for traffic control, barricading and cleanup.

Critics fear that if the ordinance is allowed to stand—it is under a court injunction—only those events sponsored by the powerful military and tourism industries, which dominate San Antonio's economic and political landscape, will be seen on its streets—streets with a long history of protests like the massive immigrants' rights marches of 2006. Events like a recent pro-Palestine protest outside the **Alamo** will, coalition members say, become prohibitively costly endeavors setting organizers back thousands of dollars for expenses that are free or very inexpensive in other cities: costs for police traffic control, overtime pay for the officers who may arrest and beat protesters, and barricades that limit space in which marchers can march. An even greater threat, locals like **Graciela Sánchez** say, is the assault on their First Amendment rights to free speech and free assembly.

"This [ordinance] pushes people to internalize the official antagonism to dissent," said Sánchez, who directs the community-based **Esperanza Peace and Justice Center** and is one of the leaders of the SAFSC, which has sued to stop the parade ordinance. "The police and bureaucrats are using the ordinance to discourage protests and make the city more hospitable to tourism and investment. They believe that downtown marches against police brutality or protests against the Israeli government in front of the Alamo are bad for business, especially in difficult economic times."

Sánchez and other critics see in the parade ordinance the workings of the same combination of military and industrial interests that have transformed the economies and streets of Mexico and the United States since **NAFTA** was approved by trade ministers in 1992 at a hotel just a few blocks from the Alamo. "Neoliberal economic policies require a policing component that quiets dissent against these same policies," Sánchez says. "We've lost a lot of jobs and are experiencing tensions because of NAFTA and other policies. This [ordinance] is dangerous and goes against our history." ROBERTO LOVATO

CLOSING GITMO: Apparently **Barack Obama** took his oath to "preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States" a tad more seriously than did his predecessor. Government lawyers acted while the inaugural celebrations were still going on to halt the Guantánamo Bay military commission trials. Obama, in one of his first official acts, ordered a suspension of the trials, which had been adjourned in anticipation of the transition of authority from former President **George W. Bush**.

The motion filed by Obama's lawyers called for a 120-day moratorium on legal proceedings so that "the newly inaugurated president and his administration [can] review the military commissions process, generally, and the cases currently pending before military commissions, specifically." Defense Secretary **Robert Gates**, a holdover from the Bush administration, which initiated the controversial trials, joined in the motion. The order to halt the tribunals was issued "in the interests of justice," according to the official request to the military judges.

"The suspension of military commissions so soon after President Obama took office is an indication of the sense of urgency he feels about reversing the destructive course that the previous administration was taking in fighting terrorism," declared **Gabor Rona**, the international director of **Human Rights First**.

"It's a great first step," Rona notes, "but it is only a first step." Lawyer **Clive Stafford Smith**, who has represented Guantánamo suspects, told **BBC Radio 4**: "It's going to take some work, but what he [Obama] is looking at I think here is a very clear-cut distinction between this administration and the last." JOHN NICHOLS

HOLY SMOKE! Last October our inbox was peppered with letters protesting a glossy, multipage advertising insert for American Spirit cigarettes. "Shocked!" "Purveyors of death!" "Tobacco blood money!" readers exclaimed. Well, a similar ad is back in this week's issue. By no means does this magazine editorially endorse cigarette companies or their products. In fact, we've run more than a few critical articles (see **Mark Schapiro**'s 2002 "Big Tobacco" exposé, for example). But advertising and editorial content are different, and we begin with "the presumption that we will accept advertising even if the views expressed are repugnant to those of the editors." We also assume that our readers "will have sufficient knowledge to judge for themselves the merits of commonly known products (such as cigarettes)." For our full ad policy, see thenation.com/mediakit/policy.

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abusive—player in the government. Ultimately, this will benefit Obama, allowing a popular president who also happens to be a brilliant communicator to build powerful coalitions and lead by example and initiative rather than secrecy and signing statements.

Russ Feingold, chair of the Constitution subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee, made many of these points in a December letter to the president-elect that outlined an agenda for restoring the rule of law. In that letter, Feingold explained "the need for a detailed accounting of what happened over the past eight years, and how the outgoing administration came to reject or ignore so many of the principles on which this nation was founded. It seems to me that we must fully understand the mistakes of the past in order to learn from them, address them, and prevent them from recurring."

Obama should reconsider his ill-conceived move-forward-at-all-costs mantra, take Feingold's wise counsel and support the appointment of a special prosecutor—or, as House Judiciary Committee chair John Conyers has suggested, an investigative commission with authority similar to that of a prosecutor. Failing that, Congress should step up and, building on the work done by Feingold and Conyers, initiate accountability hearings in order to detail the wrongdoings of the Bush/Cheney administration, address them thoroughly and, above all, begin the essential work of formally and finally ending the era of executive excess.

Missing Howard Dean

Where is Howard Dean? Republicans certainly haven't forgotten him, with candidate after candidate for RNC chair and local GOP leaders belatedly praising Dean (after mocking him for years) and calling for their own version of the fifty-state strategy, which revived the Democratic Party across the country, starting at the grassroots—especially in long-forgotten red states, many of which turned purple or blue in 2006 and '08. What was once a controversial point has now become obvious: Dean's trailblazing presidential campaign and tenure as DNC chair laid the foundation for Barack Obama's historic fifty-state campaign. Dean took one of the most thankless jobs in Washington and transformed the way the party did business and won elections, without pomp or pretension, which for a politician of his stature is remarkable.

EDITORIAL

Yet for all his successes, Dean has become a virtual stranger in his own party, with no place in the incoming Obama administration. On January 8, the day Obama announced his choice of Virginia Governor Tim Kaine to lead the DNC, Dean was on a trip to American Samoa—the last territory he had yet to visit as party chair—leading to speculation, subsequently confirmed, that he'd been snubbed by the Obama team, even as Obama publicly praised Dean as a "visionary and effective leader." Moreover, Dean has been passed over for cabinet slots such as secretary of health and human services and surgeon general, which concern his original passion and area of expertise, healthcare reform. If Rahm Emanuel, who bitterly opposed the fifty-state strategy in '06, can be Obama's chief of staff, then Dean should have a place somewhere in Obama's administration. That would be a true "team of rivals." It's a distressing sign when Bill Kristol and Obama's conservative dining buddies get treated better than Dean.

If he's not on the inside, then we hope Dean will stay active on the outside. His confidants say Dean plans to enter the private sector, teach, give speeches about healthcare reform and help political parties around the world succeed at bottom-up, progressive politics. It's our hope that Dean will continue to oxygenate the grassroots at home, working with groups like Democracy for America (run by his brother Jim), Wellstone Action, and Progressive Majority to recruit and train the next generation of progressive leaders. As Obama said in his January speech at the DNC, "We must build a movement for change that can endure beyond a single election, and that will require redoubling our efforts to reach out to Americans throughout our fifty states, north and south, east and west." Dean still has a vital role to play in such an effort.

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

'Bailout Is a No-Strings Windfall to Bankers, If Not to Borrowers' —*New York Times*

The credit crunch was causing such great woe
The feds agreed to hand some banks some dough.
We all assumed that they were going to lend it.
It turns out, though, that they prefer to spend it
On buying smaller banks and other things.
(The money they were given had no strings.)
And yes, of course, the credit crunch endures,
So don't ask banks for dough, although it's yours.

'I Saw My People'

As the Obama presidency unfolds, our new weekly column will chronicle how the promise of change meets the reality of Washington, DC. —*The Editors*

100 DAYS

Three hours before Barack Hussein Obama took the oath of office to become the nation's first African-American president, the crowd already looked impossible. Gazing west from the Capitol, you could see them: an incomprehensible mass of peaceful citizens, overwhelming every monument, impediment and security banner that had been put up to contain them. The sight was so arresting that when the senators marched out onto the rostrum, Patrick Leahy and Orrin Hatch stopped to snap photos.

My first thought, as I took in the sight from the press stand, was that I wanted them all to stay.

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I'd felt the same way on Sunday listening to 89-year-old Pete Seeger sing Woody Guthrie's oft-omitted verses to "This Land Is Your Land" on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. "In the squares of the city," he sang to the half-million who'd assembled, "by the shadow of the steeple, by the relief office—I saw my people."

I saw my people. It's been a long time since a lot of people in this country felt like their government saw them. "My parents were texting me these heart-wrenching messages," a friend, the son of Muslim immigrants, told me. "They feel like they've been welcomed back into the embrace of the American body politic." Most of the time—in fact, pretty much all the time—that "embrace" is an abstraction. In a nation of 300 million, we end up outsourcing so much of our citizenship to professionals—the organizations we write checks to and the politicians we elect—that we're left with no way to experience the simple thrill of solidarity.

Which is a large part of why I wanted the crowd to stay. But it was also because after these eight long years, Washington needs more than new blood; it needs transfusions by the pint. There are changes afoot, of course, but DC's hierarchies of power are so embedded it will require more than a few thousand new staffers to dislodge them.

Case in point: in the weeks before the inauguration, an energetic trade in inaugural tickets arose, and the economy of power and influence through which they were distributed was a perfect microcosm of How Things Work here. The process was murky (how Don King and the Tuskegee Airmen ended up within a few yards of each other is anyone's guess), but presumably it was based on nothing more than the routine traffic of favors and clout. This is a city characterized by a million ceaseless nonviolent battles for scarce resources: face time with senators, line items in the stimulus, tickets to a black-tie ball. And these battles reinscribe themselves, fractal-like, down to the most minute item: politicians campaign for office, their staff jockeys for jobs within the administration, staffers fight for office space closest to their bosses and, as one inaugural committee staffer relayed to me, volunteers battled fiercely for promotion from simple volunteer to the elevated status of "volunteer captain."

This won't change with Obama as president or the Democrats in power. Hierarchies will define the new Washington as surely as they did the old. But the central theme of Obama's campaign, what provided its form and its content, was the ability of a self-governing polity to overwhelm these hierarchies, to wrest power from the people standing behind the rope line and pass it into the hands of those crowded outside.

In his speech—which was somber, subdued and, like everything about the day, dwarfed by the sheer magnitude of the crowd and the weight of the moment—Obama referred to the imperative of democratic engagement as the "price and promise of citizenship."

Hundreds of thousands of people fulfilled that promise for the first time in their lives in this past campaign, and many of them were on the National Mall to soak it in. Tamara Stevens, a Republican for Obama volunteer from the Atlanta suburbs, had driven up in a van along with four of her fellow volunteers, people who had been strangers before the campaign. "He's the one that brought us together," she said to me, describing the bond they've formed. "It's up to us to stay together."

I wish Tamara and her group could have stayed—not just to watch Obama take the oath of office or to get gussied up and attend the balls but for the rest of the week, the whole first hundred days, the entire four years of the administration. Set up shop: take up residence on the Mall in tents, along with millions of others in a modern-day bonus army of citizens. That's a fantasy, of course. But that a crowd like this could be assembled suggests it could be assembled again, and I hope every lobbyist and staffer and hack, every member of our elected government, especially President Obama, remembers that every single day for the next four years.

The problem is that it's going to be very easy to forget. Outside of storming the city, the mechanisms by which citizens exert influence over their government are decayed. If they weren't, there's no way Rahm Emanuel could have spent much of his time on *Charlie Rose* the week before the inauguration bragging about how forcefully and seamlessly the new administration had lobbied Congress to fork over—against the will of a large majority of Americans—another $350 billion to banks with little more than a handshake and a promise.

The defining question of the Obama era is whether that crowd figures out a way to organize itself, force its way past the checkpoints and security guards and bouncers, and make its demands known. Or whether the people who enforce the boundaries of the establishment, the ones who give out the tickets and draw up the seating charts, are able to act like the whole thing never happened. CHRISTOPHER HAYES

Seeking Obama's Center

COMMENT

As I listened to Obama's inaugural address, although I harbored no illusions about the difficult task ahead, I felt that I was swimming in a sea of happiness, as I heard him gently but firmly declare the country's liberation from the past (rejecting as "false" the Bush administration's notion that national security is incompatible with constitutional liberty) and simultaneously reject the Clinton administration notion that the era of big government is over ("The question we ask today is not whether our government is too big or too small but whether it works").

Therefore, there was something off-putting when I turned on my TV the next morning to see pundit after pundit praising him as a "centrist." I had three problems with that.

First, as Paul Newman used to remind us, *The Nation* is valuable because it helps define where the center is. The center can shift. When Obama added to his ritual description of us as "a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus" a new category—"nonbelievers"—it was almost unbelievable, as he quickly helped redefine where the center is. Second, based on what we know about Obama—his books, his initial intuitive stand against the Iraq War, his Senate voting record, his campaign, his inaugural speech—I don't believe he's a centrist. At most, he seems a liberal wolf in centrist sheep's clothing. And finally, faced with the dire economic crisis, his commitment to Keynesian economic stimulus and renewed

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regulatory rigor (see his inaugural reference to not letting the market "spin out of control") suggests that at minimum, he flunked Centrism 101.

Rather, I prefer to believe that Obama's reach across the aisle, his cabinet appointments and his openings to the renegade Joe Lieberman and erstwhile opponent John McCain are part of his work-in-progress plan to advance an agenda that goes beyond anything the so-called center might contain. Whether or not it will work—that is the question. VICTOR NAVASKY

Winning & Losing in Gaza

COMMENT

Now that there is a cease-fire in Gaza, questions are emerging about what Israel has achieved. Of course, the lopsided casualty figures and Israel's military dominance certainly make it the battlefield winner. But such a "mission accomplished" assessment is as misleading in occupied Palestine as it was in Iraq. Although Hamas could not come close to matching Israel's armed might, it may have won a major battle for Palestinian hearts and minds. Reports from the West Bank, Gaza and the Palestinian diaspora suggest widespread anger at the Palestinian Authority for its passivity and a rise in support for Hamas, even among secular Palestinians, in appreciation of its determined resistance to the brutality of the Israeli occupation and military operations. If Hamas becomes the dominant political force in all of occupied Palestine when the next elections are held, Israel will be the loser.

The scorecard is also complicated on the diplomatic front. Perhaps Israel's military display will have some inhibiting effects on its opponents, but the extreme one-sidedness of the struggle evoked widespread protests and some negative diplomatic repercussions. Qatar and Mauritania, among the few states in the region that had accepted Israel, broke relations, and the European Union has suspended moves to improve Israel's status as a trading partner. The Turkish prime minister even suggested expelling Israel from the United Nations.

In this inflamed atmosphere, it is no wonder that respected international voices, ranging from the UN's high commissioner for human rights to the president of the General Assembly, are for the first time calling for a war crimes investigation. The Malaysian Parliament has unanimously called on the UN to establish a special war crimes tribunal. Even before Israel's December 27 attack, its prolonged blockade of Gaza had brought about a grave humanitarian crisis. The blockade is a form of collective punishment, and as such it is a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. On top of that, Israel's military assault inflicted massive loss of civilian life and severe damage to civilian infrastructure, including many public buildings not connected to Hamas's military. Even if Israel's claims of defensive response are accepted at face value, this is excessive use of force. There are also widespread reports that Israel has used legally dubious weapons like white phosphorus, dense inert metal explosives and depleted uranium. And finally, through its rigid control of exits, Israel has denied the people even the right to flee the fighting, a violation of humanitarian law that lends credibility to the claim that Israeli occupation policy essentially imprisons Gazans.

Winning militarily but losing politically should not surprise students of modern warfare. After all, the United States won every battle in Vietnam and yet eventually lost the war. The same was true for the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, and indeed it was the general pattern in decolonization struggles. In such wars the militarily dominant side not only loses the war but generates a deep crisis at home and experiences a tarnished international reputation. What these counterinsurgency or neocolonial wars have in common is that "the enemy" is merged with civilian society; the fighting abandons the restraints of international humanitarian law; and by killing helpless civilians, the occupying or colonial power is perceived as committing war crimes. This has been the case in Gaza, with worldwide outrage inflicting on Israel a major defeat in the battle for public legitimacy, which in the end is often decisive in shaping the outcome of major conflicts.

Neither the United States nor Israel has discovered the limits of military power in the contemporary world. The leaders of both countries seem unable to learn the lesson of recent history: that occupation in the postcolonial world rarely produces the desired results at an acceptable cost. It is from this perspective, despite a horrific price in lives and suffering, that the Palestinians may be slowly winning the "second war," the legitimacy war, whose battlefield has become global. Perhaps the most impressive victory in a legitimacy war was won by South Africa's antiapartheid movement. If the Gaza conflict brings the Palestinian struggle for self-determination to the top of the global justice agenda, it will be a major victory for Hamas. Of course, Hamas is not the African National Congress, and Israel is not South Africa. The Palestinians lack the sort of inspired leadership that Nelson Mandela and other ANC figures provided.

Military campaigns usually have a clear beginning and end, as well as a visible battlefield. In contrast, legitimacy wars have no clear boundaries and involve subtle shifts of public opinion that can alter the overall political climate in decisive ways. I believe the Gaza conflict, especially against the background of Israel's prior siege and its 2006 Lebanon misadventure, is approaching that tipping point. Despite the frightful punishment inflicted on Gaza's people, despite the bitterly divided Palestinian leadership, despite the cruelties of more than four decades of occupation, the Palestinians are poised to achieve victory.

The fragile cease-fire poses new challenges and opportunities. There are hopeful scenarios, but they depend on leaps of imagination that have been lacking on both sides. Hamas could confirm its willingness to behave as a political actor and stop firing rockets at civilians. Israel could recover in the legitimacy war by dealing directly with Hamas and taking its offer of a long-term cease-fire seriously. Israel could also show a willingness to engage in peace talks based on the 2002 Arab League Peace Initiative. Even at this late stage of the conflict, such alternatives offer both Israelis and Palestinians a promising, if perilous, escape route from the inferno.

RICHARD FALK

Richard Falk, a Nation *editorial board member, is the United Nations special rapporteur on human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories.*

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Alexander Cockburn

Hail Caesar!

Barack Obama, now the forty-fourth president, kept it brief, mercifully so. Inaugural rhetoric is a currency debauched by John F. Kennedy's appalling excesses in this department, and the genre has never gotten over it. Still, all incoming presidents are expected to alert the citizenry that there's a new commander strutting along the poop deck, which means that pledges of a new day get their usual airing, along with reassurances that America is still a beacon of freedom and virtue, also a foe whose reach is long and whose wrath is implacable.

Obama trod this familiar path, offering a mild version of blood, sweat and tears along with some finger-wagging about "a new era of responsibility." Responsibility begins at home, right there in the White House. So let's hope Obama launches the new era by accepting a fair measure of responsibility on America's part for the slaughter of some 1,300 Palestinians in Gaza, a large number of them women and children, killed by US weapons furnished to Israel along with moral and political support for its criminal actions. Let him deplore publicly Israel's savage assault, which came in the run-up to his inaugural.

I assume the talk of this new era was a softening-up salvo. Before we get there we should watch for intentions that often march through the door arm in arm with newfound responsibility. Five days before the inaugural (which may end up costing a thoroughly irresponsible $150 million, much of it furnished by taxpayers), Obama told editors at the *Washington Post* that he's going to convene a "fiscal responsibility summit" in February. This is very bad news. "Fiscal responsibility" in this context means only one thing—an attack on Social Security and Medicare. Sure enough, Obama confided to *Post* reporters that he plans to bring together "a variety of voices on solving the long-term problems with the economy and with a special focus on entitlements."

A second alarm went off when Obama indicated that this is to be a bipartisan conclave. Attacks on entitlement programs are invariably of this nature, so that Democrats and Republicans can fuse into a gray blur of "responsibility" as they hack away at the people's last frail defenses. According to the *Post*, Obama remarked that "some of the difficult choices—particularly in regards to entitlement programs like Social Security and Medicare—should be made on his watch. 'We've kicked this can down the road and now we are at the end of the road,' he said."

It's an invariable rule of inaugurals that at some point during the interminable proceedings, some TV anchor will marvel at the peaceful nature of the transition of power. So it was this time. More than one commentator seemed stunned at the fact that Obama had not been forced to purchase the loyalty of the joint chiefs of staff to assign him shock troops to winkle Bush and Cheney out of the bunker at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. But peaceful transitions are tranquil even at the rhetorical level, when those with a serious stake in the system are entirely confident that no change detrimental to their interests is going to take place once the new man takes over. Big businesses soon got frightened by FDR and immediately started planning an armed coup.

Suppose Obama had spoken to the editors of the *Post* about his resolve to mend the incontestable irresponsibility of Wall Street, that on his second day in office he was going to propose uniform regulations of all financial institutions; universal asset-transaction taxes; asset-reserve requirements that would be established to reflect stability requirements and social priorities like green investments and jobs; and a new system of loan guarantees to channel funds to productive investments. (The above list was suggested by professor Robert Pollin.)

Suppose Obama had tossed in a few robust words of support for a bill making it easier to form unions, a measure he had claimed he favored and one strongly backed by the labor movement (from which came many of the precinct workers who assured his election). The *Post*'s editors would have been abominably shocked, and there would have been harsh advisories to the president-elect the following morning. As it was, they rejoiced at the reassurance that here was yet another president pledging, just like Reagan and Bush Sr. and Clinton and Bush Jr., to shred Social Security and Medicare.

There is, incidentally, no crisis in Social Security. As a share of GDP, it's projected to increase by approximately 2 percent over the next twenty-five years, which is about the same as the increase in military spending in the Bush years. The greatest exhibition of irresponsibility in America today is the Pentagon's budget, about which no bipartisan conclave appears to be scheduled and on which Obama is so devoted to continuity that he is keeping Bush's defense secretary in place.

Each time a new president strides forth, flourishing his inaugural menu of change, one feels the same gloom at these quadrennial displays of leader-lust. Eight years of complaining about Bush's arrogation of unconstitutional powers under the bizarre doctrine of the "unitary executive," and here we have the national audience enthusiastically applauding yet another incoming president rattling off the I-will-do's as though there was no Congress and he was Augustus Caesar.

To quote Dana Nelson's useful new book *Bad for Democracy: How the Presidency Undermines the Power of the People*, the founders produced a Constitution that "gives the president only a thin framework of explicit powers that belong solely to his office: for instance, the power to grant reprieves and pardons, and to fill governmental vacancies during any Senate recess. His other enumerated powers are either shared…or secretarial and advisory." Enough of the commander in chief. All we need is a decent pardoner and a good secretary. ■

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Katha Pollitt

Stimulating Reading

It's inauguration day as I write this, and joy and hope are breaking out all over. We can do better! Let's get serious! I feel it too—I can't help it. Bidding farewell to Bush and Cheney is huge. Electing an African-American president is immense. I don't expect President Obama to set the world to rights immediately, unlike the 70 percent who, according to an Associated Press poll, expect him to fix the economy in one year. But there is something that belongs on that lengthy to-do list of his, along with rolling back Bush's midnight regulations, putting the torturers on trial and for God's sake brokering a fair and lasting settlement between Israel and the Palestinians.

Help books. I know it sounds sappy and do-goodish and earnest. But do it.

Books are in crisis in so many ways. Take public libraries. During the Great Depression, in Mayor La Guardia's New York, the public library was open seven days a week. Now, all over the country, libraries are closing or cutting their already shrunken budgets. The Free Library of Philadelphia is shutting down eleven of its fifty-four branches. Trenton, San Diego and Phoenix are just a few of the municipalities that are looking at staff reductions, shorter hours and serious cutbacks in acquisitions. In New York State, Governor Paterson is proposing a $20 million cut, one-fifth of the library budget. In New York City, Mayor Bloomberg, no La Guardia, is proposing cuts that will reduce service from six to five-and-a-half days. And urban centers are not the only places that are suffering. Newton, Massachusetts—a wealthy suburb in a sky-blue state—has closed four library branches.

It's not that people aren't using libraries anymore, preferring to hang out at a Barnes & Noble superstore or do their reading online. Library use is up—as belts tighten, people who might have bought a book in flusher times suddenly remember this fantastic free civic resource. Then, too, one thing unemployed people have is time, and libraries are free, welcoming and comforting spaces: you don't feel judged or like you should be buying something. And these days, libraries offer more than books. Did you know that according to the American Library Association, 73 percent of libraries provide the only free Internet access in their communities? In rural areas it's 83 percent. For many out-of-work people looking for jobs, for low-income students who don't have the Internet at home, the library provides the only access to information technology they can afford.

The starving of public libraries is just one piece of the problem, though. School libraries are shrinking too—sometimes there's no money for books, sometimes there's no money for staff and sometimes overcrowded enrollments eat up the space itself. Ideally, every public school classroom should have enough books for independent reading during school hours and also to lend out for home reading: vast numbers of low-income students have no other access to books. Instead, teachers who want their students to love reading are forced to beg for donations at websites like donorschoose.org and iloveschools.org. Then we wonder why reading scores are so low and why kids enter college unable to deal with challenging texts! And we are expected to cheer the return of PBS's *The Electric Company*, which claims to "promote" reading by getting kids to watch a TV show.

We are witnessing a rapid collapse in the economy of reading in both the public and for-profit realms. The print media business is in big trouble. Publishing houses are slashing jobs; Houghton Mifflin recently announced it was no longer accepting manuscripts. As ads dry up, magazines are folding or at least slimming down—pretty soon they'll be able to slip *Time* and *Newsweek* under your door, like a takeout menu. Newspapers are crashing all around us, and one of the things they are doing, in a desperate bid to save money, is cutting back their Sunday book review sections: the *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune* and *Hartford Courant* have all reduced their book sections. Recent rumblings from the *Washington Post* suggest that new executive editor Marcus Brauchli may close down *Book World*, leaving *The New York Times Book Review* as the last remaining stand-alone section devoted to books. Before long you won't even know about the books that you can't afford to buy and that the library can't afford to stock.

Most of the discussion of the book crisis focuses on the challenge to print from new technologies—blogs, the Kindle, Google Books Search—and from the ease with which one can buy used, remaindered and hugely discounted books online (sales for which the writer gets no royalties, by the way). In this analysis, government support for publishing is a bit like public subsidies for the harpsichord industry. But the book business is also a casualty of the same forces ravaging the rest of the economy: hypercharged multinational corporations, hedge fund schemes and other financial shenanigans. If the government can bail out the banks that are so deeply implicated in our current troubles—and is about to give them another huge helping of cash, even though no one really knows what the banks did with the first installment beyond shoring up their stock prices and making new acquisitions—why can't it help books and other print media? Why can't it support libraries and schools and publishing by stocking the public bookshelves with inviting new books and hiring staff to keep the doors open? Let every teacher select a box of new books for the classroom; give every low-income student a dictionary, an atlas and a selection of books to read. Middle-class parents know kids need books of their own: why do we imagine low-income kids need less? Give every school enough textbooks so that each student has what he or she needs for all courses. Stock every school and public library with up-to-date encyclopedias and other research tools.

"Shovel-ready" is the term of the hour, as the Obama administration prepares to pour billions into construction projects, many of which, like more highways, are of limited social utility. How about some projects that are reader-ready? ■

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Housing activists are demanding a foreclosure freeze, renegotiated loans and a bailout for all.

by BEN EHRENREICH

"This is a crowd that won't scatter," James Steele wrote in the pages of *The Nation* some seventy-five years ago. Early one morning in July 1933, the police had evicted John Sparanga and his family from a home on Cleveland's east side. Sparanga had lost his job and fallen behind on mortgage payments. The bank had foreclosed. A grassroots "home defense" organization, which had managed to forestall the eviction on three occasions, put out the call, and 10,000 people—mainly working-class immigrants from Southern and Central Europe—soon gathered, withstanding wave after wave of police tear gas, clubbings and bullets, "vowing not to leave until John Sparanga [was] back in his home."

"The small home-owners of the United States are organizing," Steele concluded, "tardily perhaps, but none the less surely." It wasn't just homeowners—three months earlier the governor of Iowa had called out the National Guard after farmers stormed a courthouse and threatened to hang the judge if he didn't stop issuing foreclosures. They left him in a ditch, bruised but alive. By the end of the 1930s, farmers' and homeowners' struggles had pushed the legislatures of no fewer than twenty-seven states to pass moratoriums on foreclosures.

The crowds appear to be gathering again—far more quietly this time but hardly tentatively. Community-based movements to halt the flood of foreclosures have been building across the country. They turned out in Cleveland once again in October, when a coalition of grassroots housing groups rallied outside the Cuyahoga County courthouse, calling for a foreclosure freeze and constructing a mock graveyard of Styrofoam headstones bearing the names of local communities decimated by the housing crisis. (They did not, unfortunately, stop the more than 1,000 foreclosure filings in the county the following month.) In Boston the Neighborhood Assistance Corporation of America began protesting in front of Countrywide Financial offices in October 2007. Within weeks, Countrywide had agreed to work with the group to renegotiate loans. In Philadelphia ACORN and other community organizations helped to pressure the city council to order the county sheriff to halt foreclosure auctions this past March. Philadelphia has since implemented a program mandating "conciliation conferences" between defaulting homeowners and lenders. ACORN organizers say the program has a 78 percent success rate at keeping people in their homes. One activist group in Miami has taken a more direct approach to the crisis, housing homeless families in abandoned bank-owned homes without waiting for government permission.

It's unlikely, though, that any of these activists will be able to relax soon. Other than calling for a ninety-day freeze on foreclosures—which, given that loan negotiations can take many months to work out, would almost certainly be inadequate—President Obama has been consistently vague about his plans to address the foreclosure crisis. He has indicated his support

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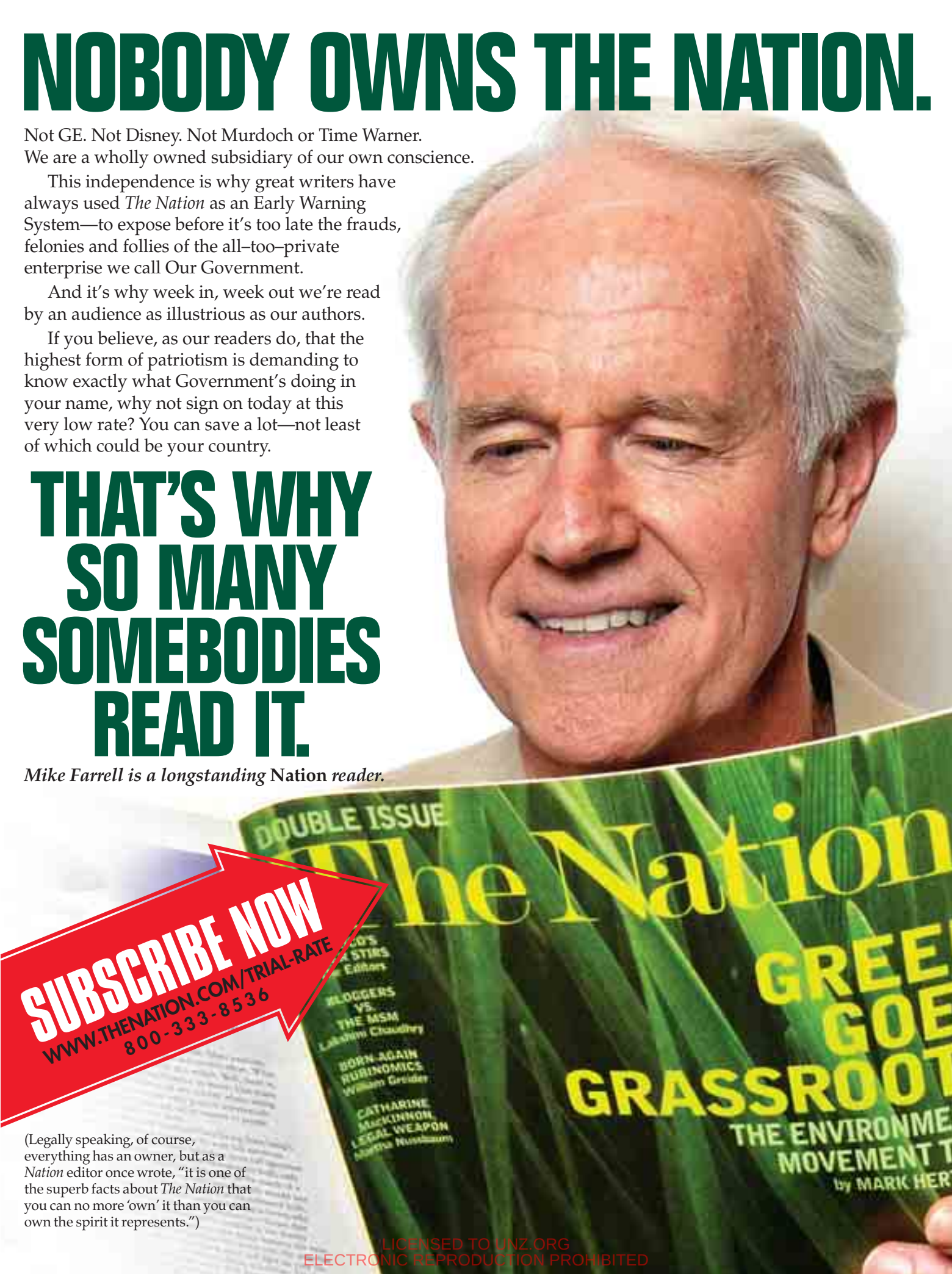
Mike Farrell is a longstanding **Nation** *reader.*



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for a $24 billion program proposed in November by FDIC chair Sheila Bair, which would offer banks incentives to renegotiate loans, aiming to reduce mortgage payments to 31 percent of homeowners' monthly income. Obama's economic team has since worked with House Financial Services Committee chair Barney Frank on a bill that would require that between $40 billion and $100 billion of what's left in the bailout package be spent on an unspecified foreclosure mitigation program. It would be left to Obama's Treasury Department to design that program. But Frank's and Bair's proposed plans are voluntary. Banks that choose not to accept federal assistance won't have to renegotiate a single loan.

Community organizers, however, aren't sitting around waiting for banks to come to the table. Nowhere have they had more cause to keep busy than in California, home to a quarter of the 3.2 million foreclosures filed in the country last year. The collapse of the state's hyperinflated real estate market has left as many as 27 percent of mortgage holders owing more on their homes than the properties are worth; California's foreclosure rate is more than twice the national average. From San Diego to Stockton, in churches, union halls and community centers, angry homeowners have been organizing to freeze foreclosures and impose a systematic modification of home loans.

The crisis has produced some unlikely activists. Faith Bautista didn't start out as a rabble-rouser. A small, energetic and stubbornly cheerful woman, she has run a tiny nonprofit called the Mabuhay Alliance since 2004. Until recently, it functioned as an all-purpose minority small-business association. With a staff of six working out of a mini-mall office behind an auto parts store in an industrial section of San Diego, the Mabuhay Alliance served a largely Filipino community (*mabuhay* translates roughly from Tagalog as *viva!*) offering, among other services, free income-tax preparation, microloans and counseling for first-time homeowners.

It was through the latter program that Bautista heard the first rumblings of the mortgage meltdown, which would ultimately bring down Wall Street's most powerful financial firms. Southern California's development boom hadn't yet begun to ebb in late 2006, but, Bautista says, "people were already calling us and asking what was going to happen. They were clearly going to default."

The community Mabuhay serves—about 40 percent Filipino, the remainder Latino, African-American and other Asians—was hit particularly hard. Throughout the housing boom, immigrant and minority borrowers were disproportionately issued high-priced subprime loans, even when they qualified for less expensive, fixed-rate mortgages. One study by the California Reinvestment Coalition found that African-American and Latino borrowers were nearly four times as likely as whites to receive high-cost mortgages. Bautista had an adjustable-rate mortgage on the home she bought in 2004. Her monthly payments soon leapt to $6,000. It took her nine months, she says, and a personal meeting with the CEO of the bank that held her mortgage, to renegotiate the loan. It quickly became obvious to her that fighting the banks on an individual basis would be inadequate to the scale of the crisis—only an organized battle for systematic changes would help keep people in their homes.

In the early months of 2007, as the first of the subprime lenders began to declare bankruptcy, Bautista started contacting major lenders, asking them to stop foreclosures and take part in a "massive loan-modification program"—dropping interest rates, writing down principals and donating executive bonuses to a fund for borrowers at risk of default. If lenders shared responsibility for the crisis, she calculated, homeowners shouldn't bear the full brunt of the suffering. Not surprisingly, she laughs, "they didn't want to talk to us."

That summer, with the help of the Greenlining Institute, a Berkeley-based research and advocacy group that works on racial equality issues, she was able to arrange a meeting with Countrywide co-founder and CEO Angelo Mozilo. At the time, almost one-fourth of Countrywide's subprime loans were delinquent. The meeting, Bautista says, was fruitless: "Eyes are closed, ears are closed." Over the next few months, she met three more times with Countrywide management, getting nowhere. "They didn't want to admit they were doing anything wrong."

> It quickly became obvious that fighting the banks individually would be inadequate—only systematic changes would keep people in their homes.

Elected officials appeared equally blind to the extent of the problem. Countrywide's stock had plummeted, but the influence of the nation's largest mortgage lender still ran deep. Mozilo's so-called Friends of Angelo program had cut favorable deals on loans to his highly placed acquaintances, including Christopher Dodd and Kent Conrad, chairs of the Senate banking and budget committees, respectively. And Countrywide, along with other top mortgage lenders and industry associations, spent tens of millions of dollars lobbying Congress and gave millions more in campaign contributions. By mid-October 2007, the government's only response to the foreclosure crisis had been the creation of the Hope Now alliance, a voluntary mortgage-industry coalition that established a telephone hot line to aid homeowners in altering the terms of their mortgages. But, critics say, the program has done little more than design repayment plans that in many cases actually increased borrowers' monthly payments. "I call it Hope Not," quips Bautista.

At the state level, things weren't much better. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger brokered a nonbinding agreement in which Countrywide and other lenders volunteered to extend the introductory low interest rates on some adjustable-rate mortgages. It only deferred disaster and did nothing for those who were already in default. Meanwhile, new foreclosure records were being broken every month.

Ben Ehrenreich, a journalist and novelist based in Los Angeles, is the author of The Suitors.

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The day before Thanksgiving, the Mabuhay Alliance, joined by the Mexican-American Political Alliance, staged a protest in front of Countrywide's San Diego office. They attempted to hand-deliver a turkey to Mozilo, who, not counting stock options, would be paid $22 million in 2007, down from $42 million in 2006. Once again, the doors were locked. Only about fifty people showed up that day, but the protest got enough press to have a powerful symbolic effect. "No one was willing to take on Mozilo in California," says Greenlining's Robert Gnaizda. "He held enormous power. And [Bautista] took him on. She forced the financial industry to pay attention."

The next week, Bautista and Gnaizda went to Washington and met with Federal Reserve chief Ben Bernanke and FDIC chair Sheila Bair, asking for a freeze on foreclosures and wholesale relief for mortgage holders. Bair was receptive, Bautista says. Bernanke was not. Eight months later, when the FDIC took over IndyMac, Bair immediately suspended foreclosures. "Now they're willing to do it," Bautista shrugs. If they'd acted

A House-Poor Nation

While the subprime mortgage crisis has garnered worldwide headlines for over a year now, politicians and the media have largely ignored the shortage of affordable units in metropolitan areas nationwide. How far does the affordable housing crisis extend? According to a 2007 study by the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, one in seven American households is "severely housing cost-burdened," spending more than half its income on housing. The same proportion of Americans lacks health insurance. The desperately poor aren't the only population that overspends on accommodations either; in 2005, 42 percent of the increase in severe cost burdens happened in households in the middle two income quartiles.

The core of the problem is a mismatch between the demand for and supply of moderately priced housing stock. While the housing bubble only marginally affected the rental market, wages did not keep up with inflation, meaning a diminishing number of workers found market-rate units within their budget. In its 2007–08 annual report, *Out of Reach*, the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) calculated that to pay the nation's average fair-market rent for a two-bedroom rental apartment, a full-time worker must earn $17.32 per hour, 2.5 times the minimum wage.

Meanwhile there's been a significant underproduction of affordable units, thanks to market failure and government inaction. In many economically vibrant cities, where the housing crunch has been most acute, developers have shifted resources to projects that yield higher profits and away from those offering consumers long-term stability. In Chicago, for example, an estimated 100,000 rental apartments were replaced by condominiums between 1989 and 2004.

Restrictive zoning regulations can stifle local construction efforts, but it's primarily a lack of political will that has prevented legislators from filling in the gaps in supply. Forty years ago, the US boasted a small surplus of housing units that were affordable to low-wage workers. After federal resources for affordable housing construction evaporated during the Reagan years—a trend that has continued unabated under Bush—that surplus has turned into a significant shortage.

Even among domestic spending priorities, affordable housing is often relegated to the back burner. Its association with public housing projects and Section 8 vouchers—immensely stigmatized programs—makes affordable housing a difficult sell for middle-class voters.

For those saddled with exorbitant home costs, the economic strain can feel overwhelming, especially for families forced to choose between housing and other basic expenses. The societal costs are equally dire. To avoid high-cost housing markets, some families have moved further away from the center city in a trend housing experts dub "driving to qualify." While ex-urban housing stock might be cheaper, it's situated further from public transportation infrastructure and jobs, meaning that families and governments must foot the environmental and economic costs of sprawl.

Stay in the city, and a whole new set of concerns emerge. Much of the nation's remaining urban affordable-housing stock is cheap because it's in poor condition and overwhelmingly located in neighborhoods with high levels of racial and socioeconomic segregation. Affordable shelter often comes at the expense of underperforming schools, underfunded healthcare services and high crime rates.

Various state and local governments have taken steps recently to augment their affordable housing stock. Denver, Boston and San Francisco are among the major cities to introduce inclusionary zoning measures, which require a certain amount of new construction to be devoted to affordable housing. The proliferation of housing trust funds is another encouraging development. The Center for Community Change estimates that thirty-eight states and more than 550 cities and counties have committed more than $1.6 billion in public revenues to housing construction and rehabilitation through this model. Both Florida and New Jersey established sustainable revenue streams of more than $100 million using this approach.

Without significant federal intervention, however, a shortage of supply will continue to dog metropolitan areas. Congress took a positive step by including in their July mortgage relief bill plans for a National Affordable Housing Trust Fund, which will pay for the construction or rehabilitation of rental units using profits from the government-sponsored mortgage companies Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac beginning in 2010. But this welcome infusion of capital won't make up for years of neglect. It's up to housing advocates like the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and the NLIHC to capitalize on this spike in interest by convincing wary lawmakers, developers and taxpayers of the economic and environmental benefits a serious investment in affordable housing construction provides.

ADAM DOSTER

Adam Doster, a senior editor at In These Times, *is a reporter-blogger for* Progress Illinois.

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earlier, she says, "all those people who were foreclosed wouldn't have been foreclosed."

In December, a few weeks after the Countrywide protest, she and Gnaizda wangled a meeting with California Attorney General Jerry Brown, asking him to sue Countrywide for defrauding borrowers. He wasn't interested, Bautista says. The following June, a few days before Bank of America bought out the crippled lender, Brown finally filed suit against Mozilo and Countrywide. Gnaizda explains the delay: "Countrywide was not weak in December."

In the meantime, all the major loan providers in the country have agreed to work with Mabuhay to modify individual loans. This means, Bautista says, that Mabuhay can help about twenty people a week. She is far from satisfied. Despite the hundreds of billions of dollars given to the financial industry, no federal or state government has provided any substantive relief to the people hit the hardest by the mortgage crisis—the ones who are losing their homes. "You gotta start from the bottom and go up," Bautista says. "If you start at the top, then at the bottom you get crumbs. You get nothing."

In December Mabuhay sponsored a "foreclosure clinic" at a community college in the San Francisco Bay Area city of Vallejo, which despite its small size—its population is about 112,000—boasted the tenth-highest foreclosure rate in the country at the time. About 150 anxious homeowners showed up, clutching thick folders of financial documents, waiting to speak with mortgage counselors. Their stories were painfully similar: one couple was struggling to pay an interest rate of 16 percent; another was unable to make $4,300 monthly payments and owed $630,000 on a home worth $370,000; another, in their mid-60s, had resigned themselves to losing the home in which they'd lived for twenty-three years and spending their retirement in a motor home.

Standing beside Bautista at the front of the auditorium, Gnaizda did his best to channel the crowd's frustration into action. "Ten million families are facing foreclosure right now," he said. "Change is not going to come about because President Obama wants it to. He is not going to act unless you hold his feet to the fire."

Gnaizda was not alone in that conclusion: other grassroots efforts to stop foreclosures have been sprouting up all over California. In metropolitan Los Angeles and Oakland, groups like ACORN had already established an effective infrastructure to organize low-income homeowners. A list of community demands that came out of a December 2007 ACORN-sponsored meeting at an Oakland senior center became the basis for a July state law requiring banks to warn homeowners thirty days before filing a notice of default. The law is credited with dramatically lowering foreclosure rates in California for two months after it took effect. (Predictably, foreclosure rates resumed their northward climb after that.)

More recently, ACORN has been pushing the adoption of the program the group helped pioneer in Philadelphia, a mandatory mediation process that forces lenders to negotiate with homeowners before filing a judgment of default. "If they can't figure this out in Sacramento," says ACORN's Austin King, "they're not trying."

Much of the local organizing on the issue, though, has not come from the usual activist suspects. Circumstances have forced groups that usually practice more staid forms of engagement into the fray, particularly in the former industrial towns just beyond the urban fringe, which have been among those hit hardest by the economic collapse. The antiforeclosure movement in Antioch, about thirty-five miles east of Vallejo, began with ten people forming an organizing committee at a local Catholic church. "We just heard dozens and dozens of stories of people struggling to keep their homes, of people losing their homes. They couldn't get any of the banks to respond or even speak to them," says Adam Kruggel, executive director of Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organization (CCISCO). Two hundred and fifty people showed up at the group's first meeting on the issue. "We sort of deputized ourselves," Kruggel says. "The government wasn't regulating the banks, so we were going to embarrass them in public."

> 'Any bank that got any bailout money needs to do loan modifications. We're not going to wait for the Obama administration.' –Adam Kruggel

The strategy worked. CCISCO protested in front of several Antioch bank branches in May. Lenders soon began returning the group's phone calls and agreeing to renegotiate their members' loans. But the Bush administration's bailout plan generated enough anger that, Kruggel says, "we realized we needed to work on a local and national level. For less than what [the Treasury] gave Wells Fargo, they could create a loan-modification program that could save a million and a half families their homes." CCISCO began coordinating with similar efforts one county over in Stockton and halfway across the country in Kansas City, and the group sent a lobbying delegation to Washington. It's asking for a six-month freeze on foreclosures and a cap on mortgage payments at 34 percent of family income. "Any bank that got any bailout money needs to do systematic loan modifications," Kruggel says. "We're not going to wait for the Obama administration."

Craig Robbins, who directs ACORN's foreclosure campaign, echoes Kruggel's sentiment: "We're excited about some of the things Obama has been saying, but there's got to be tremendous pressure for a real, comprehensive federal solution." Taking cues from Depression-era antiforeclosure movements, ACORN activists began disrupting foreclosure sales at courthouses across the country in Januaary. "We're looking to throw a wrench in the foreclosure machinery," says Robbins, adding that ACORN is planning to organize "rapid defense teams" ready to turn out crowds on short notice to prevent evictions. Until that happens, it might help to remember that the crowd of thousands that came to the Sparanga family's defense in Cleveland didn't gather until four years into the Depression. This one has just begun. ■

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Hope for the Homeless?

With homeless rates at record highs, America needs a bold new housing policy.

by PATRICK MARKEE AND LIZZY RATNER

On January 14, as the combined forces of recession and foreclosure continued their long, cruel assault on the Rust Belt, Cleveland's public school system marked the new semester with a troubling piece of data: the number of students who had been homeless at some point during the school year had jumped to 1,728. Compared with the same date in 2006, this number represented a spike of nearly 150 percent and served as further confirmation that, for all the whingeing of Wall Street executives, the poor and vulnerable have been hardest hit by the flailing economy. Not that Cleveland's poorest students needed reminding. In December, when Project ACT, a social service program for homeless students run by the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, asked a group of homeless parents what they wanted for Christmas, the parents responded with wish lists worthy of *Little Dorrit*: toilet paper, bleach, paper towels, food.

TIM ROBINSON

"We figured they'd be asking for some nice things, [but] they were asking for basic, basic household things," said Marcia Zashin, Project ACT's director. "Times are tough. They're very tough."

Such are the stories pouring out of schools and homeless shelters these days, evidence of a crisis that many fear is bound to get worse. Throughout the country, homelessness is rising, with ever more families in ever more towns and cities sleeping in shelters, surfing friends' couches and camping in their cars. In San Bernardino, California, for instance, the City Unified School District counted roughly one-third more homeless students in the 2007–08 school year than in the previous one, part of a stomach-churning trend that has pushed the number of homeless students in the state past 224,000, according to local officials. In Boston the number of families without homes shot up 22 percent, from 3,175 in December 2007 to 3,870 in December 2008. And in New York City, which shelters an astonishing 36,000 homeless people each night (including nearly 16,000 kids), the number of newly homeless families entering the shelter system hit an all-time high in autumn, with the influx in November 44 percent higher than the previous year. Along the way, the total number of homeless families bedding down each night in shelters topped 9,700—the highest number since the city began keeping records more than twenty-five years ago.

By most accounts, there's little mystery to this rise in the ranks of shelter seekers. It's the economy and, more specifically, the recession and the foreclosure crisis. As people have lost their paychecks, or as the homes they were renting were foreclosed—most of today's homeless foreclosure victims are renters who were evicted, even though they paid rent, because their landlord had not kept up with the mortgage—their tenuous grip on stability has slipped away. And many housing experts think this could be just the beginning. Because the recession is far from over; because the unemployment rate hit 7.2 percent in December and is expected to climb; because the foreclosure crisis has more misery to dole out; and because homelessness is a lagging indicator—families tend to cling to their homes as long as they can, forgoing food, clothes and medication just to keep their roof—the number of homeless families will likely continue to spike.

But there's another essential point, one that bears fundamentally on how we understand—and tackle—this crisis. While the recession has swollen the ranks of the homeless population, modern homelessness has been with us for more than a quarter-century. Long before subprime mortgages, credit default swaps and the most recent stock market crash, the United States was in the grip of the longest period of sustained mass homelessness since the Great Depression. Indeed, even before the current economic downturn some 3.5 million Americans (including 1.4 million children) experienced homelessness during the course of a year. For this we can thank not a periodic dip in the business cycle but an affordable-housing crunch spawned by nearly three decades of slash-and-burn housing policy.

Just as the Wall Street meltdown can be traced to the deregulate-at-any-cost ideology of the Reagan years, modern homelessness and the widening housing affordability gap were fostered in the Gipper's free-market nursery. From the earliest days of his administration, Reagan set about systematically dismantling federal housing programs, slashing funds for federal rental vouchers and public housing. He also initiated the shift in federal low-income housing policy away from subsidized development to tax-credit programs, which fail to help the poorest families. The reason was pure conservative hocus-pocus: the idea that housing is a commodity best created and priced by the unregulated, unfettered market and that government should play little or no role in guaranteeing shelter to its poorest citizens.

During the next decades, this ideology never disappeared, and it enjoyed a particularly virulent renaissance in George W. Bush's America. Even as the Bush administration made a show of doling out small increases to the homeless services budget (though never enough to meet the need), it hacked away at

Patrick Markee is the senior policy analyst at Coalition for the Homeless. Lizzy Ratner is a freelance reporter living in New York.

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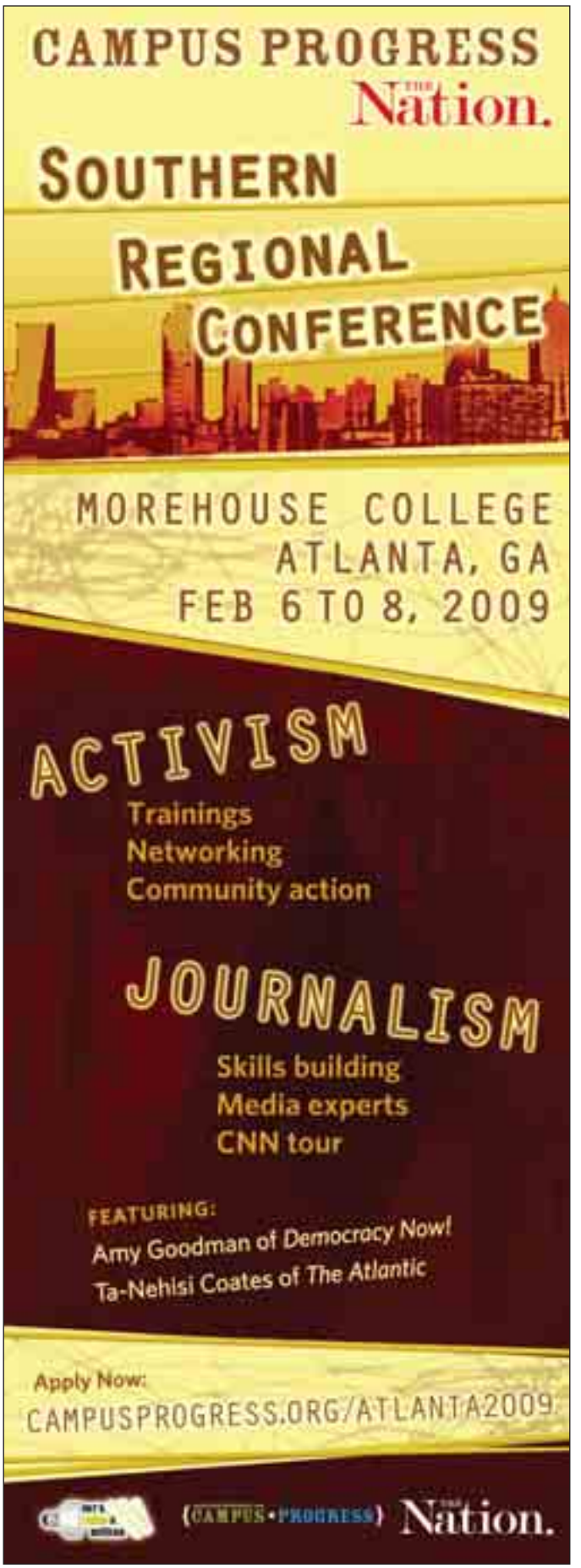
public housing, Section 8 vouchers and other housing programs, undermining any attempt at reducing family homelessness. Indeed, since 2004 funding for affordable housing programs has declined by $2.2 billion. The result is a country in which only one in four eligible low-income households receives federal housing assistance while those forced to go it alone, without any government assistance, face an increasingly harsh landscape of rising rents and declining wages. It's no wonder the number of poor renters paying more than half their income for rent rose by more than 1 million households, or 29 percent, between 2001 and 2007.

Fortunately, we have a chance to rewire the country's housing policy, an opportunity born of the start of Barack Obama's administration and a climate made more receptive to public investment by the awful imperatives of the economic meltdown. More than at any time in recent history, this moment calls for the kind of visionary and dramatic action too rarely seen from leaders—certainly not Republicans but also many Democrats, who have spent much of the past two decades fidgeting on the margins of federal housing programs.

There are a lot of ways President Obama could begin tackling such a challenge—including a bold and unequivocal commitment to ending homelessness once and for all. As another critical first step, the Obama team (including New York City housing commissioner Shaun Donovan, who is expected to be confirmed as the new head of the Department of Housing and Urban Development) and Congress can adopt a $45 billion proposal, drafted by the National Low Income Housing Coalition and forty other progressive policy groups, as part of the stimulus package. This plan is premised on years of academic research: that the best way to solve homelessness is to provide people with homes—to create permanent supportive housing (i.e., affordable housing with support services) for people living with mental illness and other special needs and to offer affordable housing assistance (in the form of vouchers or low-income housing) to homeless families.

Toward this end, the plan calls for a minimum of 400,000 new rental vouchers as well as a $10 billion infusion over two years in the recently created National Housing Trust Fund—a move that would jump-start construction of badly needed low-cost homes. To help address more imminent needs, the plan suggests expanded aid for victims of foreclosures and another $2 billion for vital homelessness prevention services. Additional investments of $15.4 billion would address the long-neglected upkeep of public housing and help these and other subsidized developments "go green" by improving energy efficiency. Taken together, these initiatives will help more than 800,000 vulnerable households and create more than 200,000 jobs.

Of course, cleaning up the wreckage of three decades of failed federal housing policy will take more than one stimulus; these measures are just the beginning of what's needed. But if change is the order of the day, dismantling the Reagan-Bush legacy of modern homelessness would be a promising way to start. ■



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Obama and the Return of the Real

by JONATHAN SCHELL

I see the work of gods who pile tower-high the pride of those who were nothing, and dash present grandeur down.
—Euripides, in The Trojan Women, *referring to the fall of Troy*

The inauguration of Barack Obama, "whose father less than sixty years ago might not have been served at a local restaurant," is both a culmination and a beginning. The culmination is the milestone represented by the arrival of a black man in the office of president of the United States. That achievement reaches back to the founding ideals of the Republic—"all men are created equal"—which have been fulfilled in a new way, even as it resonates around a world in which for centuries white imperialists have subjected people of color to oppression. The event fully justifies the national and global jubilation it has touched off. This much is truly accomplished, signed and sealed.

The beginning is, at the very least, the beginning of post–George W. Bush America, and fact-tempered hope rather than joy must be the keynote. In this context, the event is like a candle that has been lit in a dark and gusty room. How high its light will blaze is anything but clear. For the election of this unreasonably talented and appealing man occurred together with a remarkable array of crises, of which the economic one is only the newest. A man and an hour: a familiar matchup. A lot has been said about the man. Analyzing the makeup of the new administration has become the new Kremlinology, and a good deal of ink has been spilled pondering whether the avatar of "vision" has opted instead for the status quo, whether the fresh breeze from the hustings has already stagnated in the swamps of the capital, whether a bold campaign platform is being traded in for mainstream governance. And it is true that a centrist drift has been unmistakable. Joe Biden as vice president, Hillary Clinton as secretary of state, Robert Gates as defense secretary and Larry Summers as chief economic adviser—these are hardly fresh faces. The $275 billion tax cut as part of the stimulus plan was not calculated to please the Democratic "base." Yet other appointments, especially those to environmental posts, have suggested a more venturesome presidency. And public expectations are high: nearly 80 percent of the people are hopeful about his presidency.

But what of the hour—the broad shape of the new world that Obama and all of us will face? If only the economic crisis were involved, the path ahead would have something of the known and familiar. Economic cycles come and go, and even the Great Depression eased up in a little more than a decade. But this year's crisis is attended by—or embedded in—at least four others of even larger scope. The second is the shortage of natural resources, beginning with fossil fuels. Oil prices have fallen sharply from their peak of last summer, but does anyone doubt that when the economy bounces back those prices will rise with it?

TIM ROBINSON

A third crisis—less on the public mind, perhaps, because it is so old it is taken for granted—is the spread of nuclear arms and other weapons of mass destruction. The problem is not so much an arms race (though Russia has just announced a step-up in its production of intercontinental ballistic missiles and the Defense Department is bent on modernizing the US arsenal) as arms seepage, arms osmosis, owing to the deadly know-how that is spreading from brain to brain in a kind of virtual pollution.

A fourth crisis is the ecological one, comprising global warming, the wholesale human-caused annihilation of species, population growth, water and land shortage, and much else. Like nuclear danger, the planetary ecological crisis threatens something that has never been at stake before our era: the natural foundations of life on which humans and all species depend for survival. Economic and military ups and downs are for a season only. Extinction is forever.

Cutting across all these crises is a fifth that will be of immediate concern to the new president: the failure of the American bid for global empire and the consequent decline of American influence abroad. The roots of the American will to empire go deep into history but reached full flower in the Bush administration. The bid has run aground in the sands of Iraq and in the mountains of Afghanistan, among other places. Even in the unlikely event that Obama escapes those quagmires without precipitating new fiascoes, the appetite for military takeovers of other countries (an idea already thoroughly discredited more than a generation ago in Vietnam) is going to be dead for a long time. The world is not going to be run by the Pentagon, and everyone knows it. The downfall of overambitious, over-

Jonathan Schell is the Harold Willens Peace Fellow at The Nation Institute. His most recent book is The Seventh Decade: The New Shape of Nuclear Danger.

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Let Their Lives Be Your Teachers ...

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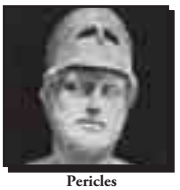
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reaching empires is an old tale. Yet if the other crises on the agenda are to be addressed, the world must be run somehow or other. The reason is not that anyone loves world government but that the problems present themselves on a global basis and will not yield to provincial solutions. The American decline thus creates—or perhaps merely accentuates—a global political vacuum. It will not be enough to mouth the words "cooperation" and "multilateralism." Something more muscular, something more definite, will be required. (In this effort, by definition a common one, the United States must of course play a significant role.)

The Gordian Knot

The contemporary crises are interwoven, forming a kind of Gordian knot. The world does not have the luxury of dealing with them seriatim. Consider the relationship of the collapsing economy to the collapsing environment. Joseph Stiglitz has noted that economists are wondering if the graph of the economic crisis will eventually prove to be V-shaped or U-shaped; but he argues that it will prove to be L-shaped. Indeed, there can be neither a V, a U or any other upward-turning graph if the remedy does not include a green revolution and a sustainable-energy program. A dirty recovery, even if possible, would be worse than no recovery. It would be the quickest path to a bigger bust. The upturn cannot in truth be "re-" anything—short of revolution—for the just-crashed "successful" economy, excellent as it was in producing cheap goods, was also producing environmental catastrophe. (Paradoxically, the recession, by cutting back on fossil-fuel use, may have done more to ease global warming than electric cars or solar panels could have done in a comparable period.) Environmentalists have long observed that if China tries to reach Western standards of living along the automotive, carbon-gushing Western path, the planet will be cooked to a cinder in short order. Now we are all in a sense in the Chinese boat. China can't have the economy we so recently had, and we can't have it again either. We'll all have to have something quite different.

The same is true of US military power, discredited by the Iraq and Afghanistan quagmires. Additional follies of this sort also have become unaffordable. To the extent that America is to be powerful in the twenty-first century, it will have to be so by cultivating a quite different sort of power.

At a glance, this tangle of crises might seem merely to be the result of a colossal accident—a world-historic pileup on the global thruway. Yet in addition to being interconnected, the crises have striking features in common, suggesting shared roots. To begin with, all are self-created. They arise from pathologies of our own activity, or perhaps hyperactivity. The Greek tragedians understood well those disasters whose seeds lie above all in one's own actions. No storm or asteroid or external enemy is the cause. Today, the economic crash is the result of investment run amok: the "masters of the universe" are the authors of their own (and everyone's) downfall. The nuclear weapons that threaten to return in wrath to American cities were born in New Mexico. The oil is running short because we are driving too many cars to too many shopping malls. The global ecosphere is heading toward collapse because of the success, not the failure (until recently), of the modern economy. The invasion of Iraq was the American empire's self-inflicted wound—a disaster of choice, so to speak. All we had to do to escape it was not to do it. Here and elsewhere, the work of our own hands rises up to strike us.

All the crises are also the result of excess, not scarcity. Too much credit was packaged in too many ways by people who were too smart, too busy, too greedy. Our energy use was too great for the available reserves. The nuclear weapon overfulfilled the plans for great-power war, making it—and potentially ourselves—obsolete through oversuccess. The economic activity of humanity—the "throughput" of productivity, to use James Gustave Speth's term for the sheer quantity of natural stuff processed by the economy and dumped back into the ecosphere—was too voluminous to be sustained by fragile natural systems. The environmentalists' word "sustainability" applies more broadly. The collateralized debt obligations, the oil use, the spread of WMDs, the military pretensions of empire: all are "unsustainable" and crashing at once. Taken together, the crises add up to a new era of limits, which now are pressing in on all sides to correct overreaching.

All the crises (but especially those that are endangering the ecosphere) involve theft by the living from their posterity. It's often said that revolutions, like the god Saturn, devour their children. We are committing a slow-motion, cross-generational equivalent of this offense. My generation, the baby boomers—ominously nicknamed "the boomers"—has been cannibalizing the future to provision the present. Though we are not killing our children directly, we *are* spending their money, eating their food, cutting down their cherry orchards. Intergenerational justice has been a subject more fit for academic seminars than for newspaper headlines. The question has been, What harm are we doing to generations yet unborn? But the time frame has been shortened and the malign transactions are now occurring between generations still alive. The dollars we have spent are coming directly out of our children's paychecks. The oil we burn is being drawn down from their reserves. The nuclear weapons we cling to for a dubious "security" will burn down their cities. The atmosphere we are heating up will scorch their fields and drown their shorelines. A "new era of responsibility" must above all mean responsibility to them. If it is true that all the crises are part of this larger crisis, then the economic crisis may simply be the means by which the larger adjustment is being set in motion, in effect dictating a forced march into the sustainable world.

All the crises are characterized by double standards, which everywhere block the way to solutions. One group of nations, led by the United States, lays claim to the lion's share of the world's wealth, to an exclusive right to possess nuclear weapons, to a disproportionate right to pollute the environment and even to a dominant position in world councils, while everyone else is expected to accept second-class status. But since solutions to all the crises must be global to succeed, and global agreement can only be based on equity, the path to success is cut off.

Finally, all the crises display one more common feature: all have been based on the wholesale manufacture of delusions. The operative word here is "bubble." A bubble, in the stock market or anywhere, is a real-world construct based on fantasies. When the fantasy collapses, the construct collapses, and people are hurt. Disillusion and tangible harm go together: as imaginary wealth and power evaporate, so does real wealth and power. The equity exposed as worthless was always phony, but

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real people really lose their jobs. The weapons of mass destruction in the invaded country were fictitious, but the war and the dying are actual. The "safety" provided by nuclear arms is waning, if it ever existed, but the holocaust, when it comes, though fantastical, will be no fantasy. The "limits on growth" were denied, but the oil reserves didn't get the message. The "uncertainty" about global warming—cooked up by political hacks and backed by self-interested energy companies—is fake, but the Arctic ice is melting anyway.

A New Stance Toward Reality

One day someone will undertake a comprehensive study of how all these bubbles grew and why they were inflated at the same time. It will be a story of a crisis of integrity of the institutions at the apex of American life. It will recount how the largest government, business, military and media organizations, as if obedient to a single command, began to tell lies to themselves and others in pursuit of or subservience to wealth and power. Individual deceivers must arrange their untruths by themselves, by flat-out conscious lying, self-deception or a combination of the two. Huge bureaucracies have wider options. Banks, hedge funds, ratings agencies, regulatory agencies, intelligence services, the White House, the Pentagon and mainstream news organizations can grind inconvenient truths to dust, layer by bureaucratic layer, until the convenient lies that had been wanted all along are presented to the satisfied money- or war-hungry decision-makers at the top. The study of these operations will be a story of groupthink; of basic facts relegated to footnotes; of wishes tweaked into facts; of deepening secrecy; of complex models, mathematical or ideological, used to supplant, not illumine, reality; of new offices created to draw false new conclusions from old facts; of threat inflation; of the sinking careers of truth-tellers and the rising careers of truth-twisters. It would be interesting, for instance, to compare the creation of the illusions of the real estate bubble with the creation of the claim that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction. In both cases contrary facts were readily available at the base of the system but were filtered out as the reports went up the chain. For a somewhat contrasting, top-down model, the White House method for suppressing the truth about global warming within government agencies is instructive. In that case, the science was duly gathered but often squelched at the last minute by political appointees editing the reports.

A concluding chapter of the study will note that the rudiments of a new stance toward reality began to be articulated. Its motto can be the famous comment a senior Bush adviser made to writer Ronald Suskind, whom he belittled as belonging to the "reality-based community," which, the adviser said, believed that "solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality." But that was no longer true, for "we're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality." Over at the American International Group, the recipient of $152.5 billion in federal bailout funds, then-chief Maurice Greenberg was saying much the same thing in happier days: "This is never going to get any better than it is today. We're so big, we're never going to swim against the tide. We *are* the tide." In short, the relationship between observation and action had been reversed. Reality was not the field of operation in which you acted, and whose limits you must respect; it was, like a play or movie, a scenario to be penned by human authors. Fact had to adjust to ideology, not the other way around.

Obama, of course, cannot wait for such a study to appear. He must batter his way out of the various bubbles and lay his hands on what is real immediately. It will not be easy. His election has done part of the job, but the mists of illusion still hover over the land. Fantasies of wealth and power, not to speak of superpower, die hard. Happy hour is more pleasant than the morning after. For bubble thinking was projected beyond the deluded institutions to national politics as a whole. The falsehoods that led to war, the fact-averse ideology that inspired the bid for empire, the investments based on fictitious ratings and the denial of the evidence of global warming: none of these grew in a vacuum. They were supported or tolerated or insufficiently discredited by the media and other organizations that inform and constitute the mainstream. The credit and debt booms were national, corporate and personal, symptoms of a nation living beyond its means at all levels. The facts of global warming, it is true, were increasingly accepted by the public—but not by the president it put in office, and there was little appetite for measures, like a gas tax, to cut back carbon emissions. As global warming intensified, the iconic American vehicle of the era was the gas-devouring, pseudo-military Hummer—an imperial auto if there ever was one. The grandiose conceptions of American power found a ready audience, as reflected in election results. They linger still as troops shift, with Obama's blessing, from the unpopular Iraq quagmire to the better accepted Afghanistan quagmire.

In short, the mainstream, like a river that jumps its bed and ravages the countryside, has overflowed the levees of reality and carried the country to disaster after disaster in every area of national life: military, economic and ecological. These depredations have paradoxically led a groggy public to yearn for the stability that Obama's centrist cabinet choices seem to promise. But they know—Obama, who denounced the "dead zone that politics had become," told them in the campaign—that these appointees had a hand in creating the ills they are now charged with addressing.

"Reality" has bifurcated in a manner confusing to politicians and citizens alike. On the one side is political reality, which by definition means centrist, mainstream opinion. On the other side is the reality of events, heading in quite a different direction. If Obama makes mainstream choices, he is called "pragmatic." And it may well be so in political terms, as the poll results attest. But political pragmatism in current circumstances may be real folly, as it was on the eve of the Iraq War and in the years of the finance bubble preceding the crash. Smooth sailing down the middle of the Niagara River carries you over Niagara Falls. The danger is not that Obama's move into the mainstream will offend a tribe called "the left" or his "base" but that by adjusting to a center that is out of touch, he will fail to address the crises adequately and will lose his effectiveness as president.

The difference between merely political pragmatism and the real thing is illustrated by the recently ended career of George Bush. From 2001 until 2006, he and his party dominated politics. Karl Rove's dreams of a permanent Republican majority looked feasible. The values voters, the soccer moms,

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the Reagan Democrats and so forth were all lining up. But another key "constituency"—one that never appears in any poll result—was quietly turning against him. It was the constituency of the real. The adjustable-rate mortgages were heading south, the energy markets were nonplussed, the warlords of Afghanistan were restive and the skidding Greenland ice shelf was voting with its feet. These were the votes that undid him. To paraphrase the old saying, Bush won power but lost the world. In the short run, the arts of delusion and deception (including self-deception) can keep politics and reality apart, but in the long run the two must meet. And then it is politics, not reality, that must adjust. Euripides understood that, too.

Hence Barack Obama's victory on November 4. He must be clear-eyed as well as brave if he is not to squander it. In this era, political safety can spell danger, for himself and for the country and world. As he faces the Himalayan problems of the twenty-first century, he should look on his stratospheric approval ratings with a wary eye. They could mean that he is adjusting too much to the rogue mainstream and not adjusting it enough to the real world. For him putting aside "childish things" means a wide berth to the dead zone. Doing so will require a toughness, even a ruthlessness, that has nothing to do with bombing villages in faraway countries. No poll can tell him what trade balances are going to be or what the people of Afghanistan or the carbon molecules are going to do, but he would be wise to let them be his masters. The path of ruling through illusion has been tried and failed. It is not open to him. He should figure out what's wrong with America and the world, honestly and directly communicate his findings to the public, do his best to fix things and then let the results speak for themselves. It's a very simple prescription—but light-years away from anything that has been tried in the United States for a very long time. ■

A Revolution in Spirit

The economic crisis requires a radical response—not revved-up consumerism.

by BENJAMIN R. BARBER

As America, recession mired, enters the hope-inspired age of Barack Obama, a silent but fateful struggle for the soul of capitalism is being waged. Can the market system finally be made to serve us? Or will we continue to serve it? George W. Bush argued that the crisis is "not a failure of the free-market system, and the answer is not to try to reinvent that system." But while it is going too far to declare that capitalism is dead, George Soros is right when he says that "there is something fundamentally wrong" with the market theory that stands behind the global economy, a "defect" that is "inherent in the system."

The issue is not the death of capitalism but what kind of capitalism—standing in which relationship to culture, to democracy and to life? President Obama's Rubinite economic team seems designed to reassure rather than innovate, its members set to fix what they broke. But even if they succeed, will they do more than merely restore capitalism to the *status quo ante*, resurrecting all the defects that led to the current debacle?

Being economists, even the progressive critics missing from the Obama economic team continue to think inside the economic box. Yes, bankers and politicians agree that there must be more regulatory oversight, a greater government equity stake in bailouts and some considerable warming of the frozen credit pump. A very large stimulus package with a welcome focus on the environment, alternative energy, infrastructure and job creation is in the offing—a good thing indeed.

But it is hard to discern any movement toward a wholesale rethinking of the dominant role of the market in our society. No one is questioning the impulse to rehabilitate the consumer market as the driver of American commerce. Or to keep commerce as the foundation of American public and private life, even at the cost of rendering other cherished American values—like pluralism, the life of the spirit and the pursuit of (nonmaterial) happiness—subordinate to it.

Economists and politicians across the spectrum continue to insist that the challenge lies in revving up inert demand. For in an economy that has become dependent on consumerism to the tune of 70 percent of GDP, shoppers who won't shop and consumers who don't consume spell disaster. Yet it is precisely in confronting the paradox of consumerism that the struggle for capitalism's soul needs to be waged.

The crisis in global capitalism demands a revolution in spirit—fundamental change in attitudes and behavior. Reform cannot merely rush parents and kids back into the mall; it must encourage them to shop less, to save rather than spend. If there's to be a federal lottery, the Obama administration should use it as an incentive for saving, a free ticket, say, for every ten bucks banked. Penalize carbon use by taxing gas so that it's $4 a gallon regardless of market price, curbing gas guzzlers and promoting efficient public transportation. And how about policies that give producers incentives to target real needs, even where the needy are short of cash, rather than to manufacture faux needs for the wealthy just because they've got the cash?

Or better yet, take in earnest that insincere MasterCard ad, and consider all the things money can't buy (most things!). Change some habits and restore the balance between body and spirit. Refashion the cultural ethos by taking culture seriously. The arts play a large role in fostering the noncommercial aspects of society. It's time, finally, for a cabinet-level arts and humanities post to foster creative thinking within government as well as throughout the country. Time for serious federal arts education money to teach the young the joys and

Benjamin R. Barber, a distinguished senior fellow at Demos, is the author of Jihad vs. McWorld *and* Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults and Swallow Citizens Whole.

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powers of imagination, creativity and culture, as doers and spectators rather than consumers.

Recreation and physical activity are also public goods not dependent on private purchase. They call for parks and biking paths rather than multiplexes and malls. Speaking of the multiplex, why has the new communications technology been left almost entirely to commerce? Its architecture is democratic, and its networking potential is deeply social. Yet for the most part, it has been put to private and commercial rather than educational and cultural uses. Its democratic and artistic possibilities need to be elaborated, even subsidized.

Of course, much of what is required cannot be leveraged by government policy alone, or by a stimulus package and new regulations over the securities and banking markets. A cultural ethos is at stake. For far too long our primary institutions—from education and advertising to politics and entertainment—have prized consumerism above everything else, even at the price of infantilizing society. If spirit is to have a chance, they must join the revolution.

The costs of such a transformation will undoubtedly be steep, since they are likely to prolong the recession. Capitalists may be required to take risks they prefer to socialize (i.e., make taxpayers shoulder them). They will be asked to create new markets rather than exploit and abuse old ones; to simultaneously jump-start investments and inventions that create jobs and help generate those new consumers who will buy the useful and necessary things capitalists make once they start addressing real needs (try purifying tainted water in the Third World rather than bottling tap water in the First!).

The good news is, people are already spending less, earning before buying (using those old-fashioned layaway plans) and feeling relieved at the shopping quasi-moratorium. Suddenly debit cards are the preferred plastic. Parental "gatekeepers" are rebelling against marketers who treat their 4-year-olds as consumers-to-be. Adults are questioning brand identities and the infantilization of their tastes. They are out in front of the politicians, who still seem addicted to credit as a cure-all for the economic crisis.

And Barack Obama? We elected a president committed in principle to deep change. Rather than try to back out of the mess we are in, why not find a way forward? What if Obama committed the United States to reducing consumer spending from 70 percent of GDP to 50 percent over the next ten years, bringing it to roughly where Germany's GDP is today? The Germans have a commensurate standard of living and considerably greater equality. Imagine all the things we could do without having to shop: play and pray, create and relate, read and walk, listen and procreate—make art, make friends, make homes, make love.

Sound too soft? Too idealistic? If we are to survive the collapse of the unsustainable consumer capitalism that has possessed our body politic over the past three decades, idealism must become the new realism. For if the contest is between the material body defined by solipsistic acquisitiveness and the human spirit defined by imagination and compassion, then a purely technical economic response is what will be too soft, promising little more than a restoration of that shopaholic hell

DEAR PRESIDENT OBAMA

We congratulate you and wish you the very best of fortune in your great undertaking. As writers, we admire your eloquence and your engagement with ideas. But we are worried because a new beginning will not be possible as long as we continue to spill the blood of the men, women, and children of Afghanistan. The Taliban is not a direct military threat to the United States nor are the people of Afghanistan. There is no victory for those who attempt to occupy Afghanistan, as the Soviets and the British discovered. There will be no progress at home while such an all-consuming war is being waged. If we stay, the situation will get worse, not better, and the toll in American lives and American prestige, as well as the damage to our standing in the Middle East and to the American budget will be staggering and tragic. Wartime presidents accomplish little else. We urge you to negotiate with the Taliban, withdraw all troops from Afghanistan, and begin the moral and physical rebuilding of Afghanistan, as well as that of the United States.

Laila Al-Arian	John Guare	Jay Parini
Russell Banks	Bruce Guernsey	Jeremy Pikser
Christian Bauman	Jessica Hagedorn	Milbry Polk
John Berger	Jim Harrison	Francine Prose
Kate Bernheimer	Chris Hedges	Barbara Reilly
Jeff Biggers	Adam Hochschild	Michael Ratner
Max Blumenthal	Israel Horovitz	F.D. Reeve
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Landrum R. Bolling	Linton Kwesi Johnson	Robert Scheer
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Martha Cooley	Mark Kurlansky	Patti Smith
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of hyper-consumerism that occasioned the current disaster.

There are epic moments in history, often catalyzed by catastrophe, that permit fundamental cultural change. The Civil War not only brought an end to slavery but knit together a wounded country, opened the West and spurred capitalist investment in ways that created the modern American nation. The Great Depression legitimized a radical expansion of democratic interventionism; but more important, it made Americans aware of how crucial equality and social justice (buried in capitalism's first century) were to America's survival as a democracy.

Today we find ourselves in another such seminal moment. Will we use it to rethink the meaning of capitalism and the relationship between our material bodies and the spirited psyches they are meant to serve? Between the commodity fetishism and single-minded commercialism that we have allowed to dominate us, and the pluralism, heterogeneity and spiritedness that constitute our professed national character?

President Obama certainly inspired many young people to think beyond themselves—beyond careerism and mindless consumerism. But our tendency is to leave the "higher" things to high-minded rhetoric and devote policy to the material. Getting people to understand that happiness cannot be bought, and that consumerism wears out not only the sole and the wallet but the will and the soul—that capitalism cannot survive long-term on credit and consumerism—demands programs and people, not just talk.

The convergence of Obama's election and the collapse of the global credit economy marks a moment when radical change is possible. But we will need the new president's leadership to turn the economic disaster into a cultural and democratic opportunity: to make service as important as selfishness (what about a national service program, universal and mandatory, linked to education?); to render community no less valid than individualism (lost social capital can be re-created through support for civil society); to make the needs of the spirit as worthy of respect as those of the body (assist the arts and don't chase religion out of the public square just because we want it out of City Hall); to make equality as important as individual opportunity ("equal opportunity" talk has become a way to avoid confronting deep structural inequality); to make prudence and modesty values no less commendable than speculation and hubris (saving is not just good economic policy; it's a beneficent frame of mind). Such values are neither conservative nor liberal but are at once cosmopolitan and deeply American. Their restoration could inaugurate a quiet revolution.

The struggle for the soul of capitalism is, then, a struggle between the nation's economic body and its civic soul: a struggle to put capitalism in its proper place, where it serves our nature and needs rather than manipulating and fabricating whims and wants. Saving capitalism means bringing it into harmony with spirit—with prudence, pluralism and those "things of the public" (*res publica*) that define our civic souls. A revolution of the spirit.

Is the new president up to it? Are we? ■

Exchange

(continued from page 2)

we normally do not see in the US media. *The Nation* is to be commended for taking a humanitarian and sensible position while most others are following jingoistic and factually deficient positions. The complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot continue to blind us to the fact that people are suffering, that an entire population is being displaced, that a whole society is being dismantled and that human rights are being violated on a large scale and on a daily basis. As a member of the dismembered Palestinian community who was lucky enough to find a second home in the United States, I am reminded daily of the blind bias that permeates US political and media elites. Thank you for helping to keep my faith in the American press alive.

Thank you also for giving voice to members of the US Jewish community who decry violence against the Palestinians and who advocate peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The American Jewish community, especially its liberal elements, remains essential to halting the abuses taking place in the Holy Land.

Fuad K. Suleiman

Klein Replies

Toronto

Robert Pollin believes that the biggest problem with the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) strategy is that it targets only one side in the conflict. For Pollin, this is a conflict between equally guilty parties deserving of equal punishment. It is not. Israel is the party that displaced hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in 1948, annexed more of their land in 1967 and continues to occupy the land today. Occupiers and occupied people do not share the same responsibilities, which is why the duties and responsibilities of an occupying power are laid out in the Geneva Conventions—laws Israel violates with impunity.

Even if I were to accept Pollin's argument that any sanction should punish both sides equally, we face a rather large problem. How does Professor Pollin propose that we punish Gazans more than they are being punished already? In case he has failed to notice, there is already a fierce campaign of boycotts and sanctions under way, and it is completely one-sided. I am referring, of course, to Israel's brutal eighteen-month siege of Gaza, launched to teach Gazans a lesson for voting for Hamas in US-backed elections. As a direct result of this siege, Gazans have been deprived of lifesaving medicines, cooking fuel and paper—not to mention food. This is far more than a mere boycott; it's "collective punishment," as described by Richard Falk, United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. By contrast, the kind of legal boycott being called for by the BDS campaign would deprive Tel Aviv of some international concerts and, if it really got going, would cost Israel some foreign investment. It would not starve and sicken an entire people. In this context of actual one-sided punishment inflicted on Palestinians, sanctioned by the so-called civilized world, to complain of one-sided boycotts against Israel is, frankly, obscene.

As for the proposed $10 billion for a redevelopment/relocation fund, there is no doubt that if a just peace agreement is ever to be reached, a generous peace dividend will be required to make it work. But before we start handing out rewards for a nonexistent peace, Israel first has to decide that endless war is too costly. And that's what the BDS strategy is for: to help Israel come to that eminently reasonable conclusion.

Naomi Klein

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Books & the Arts.

ISAAC SOLOTAROFF

Ted Solotaroff at his desk at *Commentary* in the early 1960s

Adventures in Editing

by TED SOLOTAROFF

I began working at *Commentary* in September 1960, some nine months after Norman Podhoretz had taken over, invigorating the magazine and steering it in a less Jewish and more leftward direction. By leading off his first three issues with long excerpts from *Growing Up Absurd* by Paul Goodman, the surprise witness whose testimony would soon change the terms of the debate about American society from conformist to deformed, Norman made it clear that the magazine would hold its own as the suddenly prominent new voice of a new decade. It was a great place to be, and a vastly unexpected one for someone who had been about to begin teaching two sections of Factual Writing for Forestry Students at the University of Washington.

The first morning, I was shown into my office by Sherry Abel, the managing editor, a large, graceful, middle-aged woman with a droll air. "Norman wants you to read these," she said, indicating a file folder on the desk with several manuscripts. "They're for the meeting this afternoon. After that you can look through those." She nodded toward two stacks of manuscripts, their return envelopes attached to them like lepers' bells. "They're from what we call the slush pile. You'll soon see why."

And that was more or less that. No indoctrination, no getting-to-know-you, almost zero curiosity except for a sly glance. Welcome to the Big Time. As Sherry went out she asked me if I wanted the door open or closed.

"Closed, please."

"You men," she said, a throaty chuckle trailing behind her.

I sat down at the desk and took it all in: an ample, spick-and-span office with its contemporary walnut desk and chair, new filing cabinet, spiffy Olympia typewriter and wide view of the Upper East Side. The *Commentary* quarters took up a floor of a new office building that housed the American Jewish Committee, the class act of the national Jewish organizations. I felt like I was being taken into one of those patrician

Ted Solotaroff (1928–2008) was an editor at Commentary *and* Book Week, *the founding editor of* New American Review *and a senior editor at Harper & Row. He was a contributing editor of* The Nation *and the author of two memoirs,* Truth Comes in Blows *and* First Loves.

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German-Jewish families like the Lehmans or the Strauses, I who not too many years ago had been a waiter at a family dinner party that Senator Lehman had led with the quiet aplomb and tact of a most civilized aristocrat. I'd been so bowled over that my standing resentment of privilege had collapsed.

I floated on the exhilaration for a few minutes more, fending off the internal naysayer who wanted to know how appropriate a sense of confidence, even entitlement, was for someone who had never worked a day at a magazine, whose only credential for this highflying job was a review of a minor novel and two shaky, mostly guesswork pieces on Jewish-American writing. Even Podhoretz had been surprised that I'd taken his offer instead of going to the University of Washington and finishing my dissertation. But there it was: it didn't feel like a gamble, or even a run of luck; it was beginning to feel like my destiny. The highflier I'd had inklings and flashes of being as a student and freshman English teacher and recently as a writer was apparently taking over, as was the dormant Jew I had begun cultivating.

Or was it only that, like clothes, the office makes the man? This one was a far cry from the little cubicle I'd left at the University of Chicago—the battered desk with the stuck drawer, the hard-on-the-ass chair, the clunky old Royal with its red-and-black ribbon, the piles of student themes, staff memos, syllabuses and the spillover of my dissertation on Henry James. The cubicle at Chicago I had been so proud to have earned as the only graduate student on the college English staff was now the objective correlative, as we used to say, of myself at the bottom of the academic ladder.

Poking around, I opened the top drawer of the desk. Staring at me were two crisp stacks of rejection slips:

> We regret that your manuscript isn't suitable for *Commentary*.
>
> The Editors.

They were more courteous than the slips I'd received six or seven years ago. But the message was the same blank shrug. After leaving college and settling in New York, I had tried to lead a fiction writer's life for several years and gotten nowhere. I'd lived from one rejection slip to the next, reduced to taking heart from a "Sorry" or "Try us again" scribbled occasionally at the bottom. After my labored stories came back from *New World Writing* and *Partisan Review*, I'd send them to *Commentary* before submitting them further down my prestige chain to *Harper's* and *The Atlantic*. It was at *New World Writing* or *Partisan Review* that I had fantasized I would someday "arrive."

I turned to the two sets of manuscripts. First, I read through those of the finalists, four or five of them, along with the comments of the other three editors, and added a comment of my own. One of them, a piece about how the control of medical policy and services was passing from the American Medical Association to government and the unions, was written in such clumsy, jargon-ridden prose that I thought it could have slipped in from the slush pile, and said so. Chutzpah had mostly gotten me here, so I went with it. Also, during the meeting at which Podhoretz had offered me the job, I had soon become aware that he liked people who were outspoken like himself and tended to walk all over those who weren't.

I then turned to the unsolicited manuscripts and found two or three that were marginally promising, even to the point that a stronger writer seemed to be lurking on the outskirts of the story or essay. For the rest of the morning I wrote specific suggestions in the margins and then a carefully encouraging cover letter to the authors. To some of the others I attached shorter letters, explaining their manuscripts' main problems. To the remaining ones, the hopeless, I said that perhaps they should try a different kind of magazine or journal—and signed my name.

That afternoon's meeting moved along with a relaxed dispatch, with Norman keeping a surprisingly easy hand on the wheel. I'd expected him to run the magazine with the same hard-driving authority out of which he wrote and that he had occasionally summoned when sizing me up. But now he acted as though his opinion was worth no more than ours, and the discussion was much more collegial than most of those at the English staff meetings at the University of Chicago, where everyone was vying for position, even an adjunct like me who hardly had one. When the article on the change in medical governance came up, Norman read my comment about how badly it was written, tossed it my way and said, "We agree. But it's an important piece. It just needs heavy editing. See what you can do."

Clearly I was being tested, maybe even having my feet set on the road to the slaughterhouse. I'd thought that editing a magazine as consistently well written as *Commentary* was like umpiring, calling the pitches and occasionally dusting off home plate; working on "Medical Care and the Consumer" was more like do-it-yourself plumbing, water rippling all along the ceiling and I having barely a clue of how to locate or fix the leak.

There was no question of going to Norman for instruction or even a few tips; if he had wanted to give me any, he would already have done so. Nor did I feel I could ask Sherry for help. I had been brought in as an associate editor, I was being treated as one and I should know what to do. What I knew how to do was to help students with various bad habits and ignorances write better. But the author of "Medical Care and the Consumer" was hardly a freshman and hardly ignorant. He wrote like a bureaucrat but clearly knew what he was writing about, unlike myself. He was also an official of the American Jewish Committee and worked on the next floor.

Faute de mieux, I began to practice what I'd been teaching on the clogged syntax and denatured diction of Martin T. Price,

Editor's Note: The last article Ted Solotaroff wrote for *The Nation* was a short tribute to Emile Capouya, an essayist, short story writer, book editor and, from 1970 to 1976, this magazine's literary editor. When his article was published in 2005, Ted was immersed in writing a memoir about his own days as a literary editor and critic. "Adventures in Editing," the second part of which will appear in the next issue of *The Nation*, is an edited version of that memoir, which was left unfinished when Ted died in August. "Adventures in Editing" concerns Ted's first magazine gig: the years he worked under the tutelage of Norman Podhoretz at *Commentary* in the early 1960s. As Ted honed his editorial chops, befriended writers and clashed with his boss, he also gradually awakened to the conviction that would soon guide his work on the phenomenal little magazine *New American Review*: "Literature was too important a democratic resource to be left to the literati." One can also see Ted fashioning what book editor Gerald Howard has called his "exquisitely calibrated openness to the new with old-school rigor." We are especially grateful to Ted's literary executor, Maura Spiegel, for her assistance in publishing this article; to his son Isaac Solotaroff for providing photographs of Ted; and to Adam Bright for research.

—*John Palattella*

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as I'll call him, though proceeding much more cautiously than I would with a student's writing. The trick, I thought, was to boost the writing to high-level journalism while maintaining as best I could the author's organization; the sentences that more or less worked, however dull; and, as much as I could, the authority of his voice. I spent most of the week in the office as well as evenings at home trying to carry out these mismatched tasks, often erasing and revising my own editing in the margin.

I finally decided I could do no more—or less—with Martin T. Price and brought the edited manuscript to Sherry. I asked her whether I should send it upstairs to the author or ask him to come to my office and go over it with him there. Also, could she look it over and see if it was OK?

Sherry, who always kept her office door open, was about twenty years older than Norman or I, less motherly than big-sisterly, less big sister than a still-vital woman who liked young men. Handsome and leggy, often wearing net stockings, she had long, dancing eyes, a repertory of smiles and giggles and an arty fringe of hazel-gray curls. Sister to the famous Trotskyist lawyer Albert Goldman, who had gone to prison with his clients, Sherry had been married to the playwright, critic, Village *flâneur* and provocateur par excellence Lionel Abel, who still hung around her, and she had spent a number of years in Paris, where she had been great friends with Henry Miller and Wambly Bald (the original of the priapic Van Norden in *Tropic of Cancer*).

On the other hand, she was all business. When I brought the marked-up manuscript to her she took it out of my hand, read a little and handed it back. "Ted," she sighed, "this is barely legible, much less readable."

"I thought you could tell me if I'm on the right track. I've still got his original version so I can transpose my changes before I send it to him or have him come in."

"But everything will have to be retyped anyway, my dear. Give this to your assistant to do and then I'll look it over."

"But should it be retyped before the author sees my changes? Isn't that pretty presumptuous? And what about my suggestions to him?"

"*Commentary* editors, dear Ted, are very presumptuous. It's part of our role. It's how we've managed to publish so many sociologists and rabbis. Also, the ones who write this badly are not as interested in our suggestions as they are in being published in our magazine."

I had the piece retyped and gave it to her. She read the first page, glanced at the rest and said, "I'd say it's about halfway to being a *Commentary* piece."

"Halfway? There will hardly be anything of Price's left."

"Sure there will," she said. "There will be his information and your presentation of it. As Norman likes to say, 'Put it through your typewriter.' And right away. We close the issue on Friday and Price's piece is in it."

"Without him seeing it?"

"Oh, he'll see it in galleys, and I'm sure he'll be very pleased by how good you're going to make him sound."

"But that's completely rewriting it."

"Of course it is. Just remember, Ted, that you don't have to please the author. You have to please Norman and me."

I did what she advised. I quickly looked over a couple of recent pieces on a topical social issue, picked up what seemed to be a basic *Commentary* tone and then ran my typewriter like a power mower through Price's remaining verbiage and my cautious trims and borders. Much relieved as well as pleased by the skill I was discovering, I was still hard at work the next day when Sherry came into my office and asked where the piece was.

"I'm just about finished. I'll have it to you by five o'clock."

"But we're closing the issue this afternoon."

As she spoke, she noticed the piles of manuscripts on my desk and other piles on the chair and window ledge. "My, you have a lot of manuscripts. I'll bet you have as many manuscripts as the rest of us put together. Haven't you returned any yet?"

"Of course I have. These are mostly from people I've been corresponding with."

"*Corresponding* with?" She took it in, turned it over and then said with mock gentleness, "Oh, dear Ted, you've made a discovery, haven't you? You've discovered that behind every manuscript is a soul. But now you must make another discovery. You must discover that some souls are worth a hell of a lot more than others."

The Price piece passed under her blue pencil pretty much as I'd rewritten it. "Not bad," she said. "But you're going to have to be faster and on time."

Clair de Lune

We revolt ourselves; we disgust and annoy us.
The way we look at us lately chills us to the core.
We become like those who seek to destroy us.

We push ourselves into small tasks that employ us
unrewardingly on purpose. We tire, we bore.
We revolt ourselves; we disgust and annoy us.

We rent ourselves to what force will enjoy us
into oblivion: wind, drink, sleep. We pimp, we whore.
We become like those who seek to destroy us.

We cat-and-mouse, roughhouse, inflatable-toy us
in our heads' red maze, in its den, on its shore.
We revolt ourselves; we disgust and annoy us.

We take offense at our being; we plot, we deploy us
against us and flummox; we wallow, we war.
We become like those who seek to destroy us.

If in triumph, our defeat; in torture, our joy is.
Some confusion so deep I can't fathom anymore.
We appall ourselves; we disgust and annoy us
into those we become we who seek to destroy us.

TIMOTHY DONNELLY

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I could see that unless I wanted to become the Miss Lonelyhearts of the unpublished, I would have to restrain my helping hand, and if I were going to prosper here, I'd have to be more hardheaded. If I was going to be a mensch as an editor, I first had to become an editor.

Yet I sensed that my years of struggle and rejection were not to be discounted. Nor was the desire to pass on what I had been granted by my mentors or the menschy editors who had given me a break. The question was how to join the ruthless economy of an editor to the empathy of a once-aspiring writer.

In the next three months I was swept along by a high, prolonged wave of opportunity. I had come to New York with a review under way of Karl Shapiro's *In Defense of Ignorance*, a prominent poet's demolition job of what was regarded as the "age of criticism." I thought I had done a good job of threading my way between what I felt to be right and opportune in Shapiro's attacks and their episodes of overkill. Norman said that I should go over it with Sherry.

She scanned the first paragraph. "So many words," she said. "So much 'on the one hand, on the other hand.'" She read on. "'Shapiro is a critic in spite of himself.' That begins to be interesting." She drew a diagonal line through the first two paragraphs, which I had rewritten about twenty times, trying to introduce the argument in a balanced way. "Let's start here and see if we can make this less ponderous."

"Wait a minute, you're amputating my approach."

"No, dear Ted. I'm taking down your scaffolding."

Well, what she proceeded to do was a revelation. What I had thought was a solid review turned out to have as much fat as a sixteen-ounce blue-plate special. My resentment at being told I was ponderous turned into gratitude once I began to see with her eye and fall into step with her pace. "Why the double adjectives here? Give me a good precise one." My overzealous development of a point—example, comment, further example, more comment, final example (what Sherry called "the graduate school schlep")—turned into an incisive statement and the best example, and moved on. She showed me how removing a transitional or topic sentence from the head of a paragraph could energize the line of discussion and more involve the reader. "This is how Lionel would do it," she would say, cutting a sentence to the quick or making two or even three related sentences into one to heighten the play of thought. She also eliminated most of the qualifying phrases I was habituated to from graduate school ("It is true that…nonetheless"; "by and large"; "to be sure"). "Stuffy," she would grunt. Or, with that chuckle, "I don't like men who equivocate."

Much the same instruction came in a different way a month later. That past summer, Norman had asked me to write a full-length piece about Harry Golden, who had become a phenomenal success after publishing two collections of snippets from his one-man newspaper, *The Carolina Israelite*. I begged off, saying that I had to finish my dissertation, move my family to Seattle and get established in my first real faculty position. But since I had the famous young editor of the much-vaunted "new *Commentary*" on the line, so to speak, and my chutzpah on tap, I added that Golden's popularity was more significant than Golden himself, that he might think about getting Dwight Macdonald to look into Golden's reviews, much as Macdonald had done with "By Cozzens Possessed," his famous attack on another heavily inflated reception. Norman wrote back, saying that he liked the idea and would wait for me to tackle it.

My generation was bringing up the rear of what Rosenberg called the 'herd of independent minds.'

Now it seemed I had to do so. Ironically enough, my dissertation's final chapter, which I was typing up at the time I changed careers, addressed the handful of reviews of *The Bostonians* along with personal responses from William and Alice and various friends and ill-wishers in Boston and Cambridge, where the novel was mildly notorious for a while. From Harry (as he was called in the family) James to Harry Golden in a single bound of 4-by-6 index cards. With Golden, it was all there for the processing: several hundred reviews provided by his publisher that documented the feast of Jewish acceptance and Golden's role as court jester to the Eisenhower Age. But with all those reviews to plow through, I had to write the piece in a few days to meet the deadline. The result was thirty pages or so of rapid prose, burdened by the ex–graduate student's habits of documentation.

"Why all the references?" Norman said. "No one is going to think you're making this up." This time he stepped in as editor. By the end of the day I received from his assistant a much smoother, quicker and punchier version of what I had turned in, retyped in *Commentary* columns and ready to go. A typewriter job by a master. Though improved almost everywhere, it still had my points, my continuity and mostly my language, except for one sentence of his own that Norman had stuck in: "To be on top is to be on top, which is a wonderful place to be."

As I restored my phrasing in a few places and added a few final touches, Norman's sentence began to rankle. It wasn't me, though it did rise from the context as something Golden had all but said. But it was also pure Norman. By then I was already familiar with his notion that in the intellectual world the "dirty little secret," in D.H. Lawrence's phrase, was not sex but success, a truth that only he and his great friend Norman Mailer fessed up to and openly acted upon. All the rest of us liberal intellectuals were closet glory-seekers held back by our phony modesty. It was my first example of Norman's need to be armed with a truth that almost no one else would publicly acknowledge believing.

I didn't imagine he would have resisted my cutting the sentence or that I would have lost points doing so. He didn't pull rank in that way. Meanwhile I was experiencing the euphoria of having my piece turned into the lead in the next issue and possibly one that would now be compared favorably to Dwight Macdonald's "By Cozzens Possessed." Grateful to Norman for the improvements, bowled over by his editorial deftness and speed, intoxicated by the anticipation of having "arrived" in the *Commentary* orbit of the New York literary-intellectual stratosphere, I left the sentence in, thus opening the way to taking as much liberty with the pieces I edited.

Toward the end of the '50s, *The New Leader* featured one of those symposiums on "whither the younger generation." Norman's contribution stood out. He attributed our values—prudence, responsibility, tastefulness, privacy, circumspection, caution—to the moral climate and cultural conditions of the times. The power and position of America as the leader of the free world and its present prosperity were more conducive to accommodation than criticism, he argued, and gave rise to a thoughtful, middle-class lifestyle that put great stock in the opportunities and responsibilities of the private life—a more strenuous arena than the po-

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litical one that had preoccupied the preceding generation. Most notably, Norman demolished the "intellectual revisionism" as well as anticommunism of our ex-radical mentors (who had targeted the jejune and doctrinaire leftist pieties of possibility, whether of human nature or society) and their refusal to take a "sufficiently complicated view of reality." By the same token, for Norman the bohemianism of the recent past had become as dubious as Popular Front Stalinism.

All in all, it was a sharply pointed and coherent, if not novel, description of the life of many of us, who were entering our 30s to find that we had spent our 20s as earnest young husbands and fathers and graduate students. Most of my peers at Chicago, now junior faculty, were locked into difficult domestic arrangements that they had brought upon themselves by marrying much too young. Why had we done so? Partly from the example of the veterans who dominated campus life when we went to college and who set a tone of maturity and seriousness. To be married like so many of them would be to enter adulthood. That was the exterior and, to some extent, superficial reason for our choice. The interior reason typically boiled down to postadolescent insecurity and idealism, a potent recipe for misjudgment. Now, some years past the most desperate ones, our children in school, a junior faculty or executive position in hand, a bit of money in the bank to modestly refurbish our lives, we had reached the stability we had sacrificed so much for. The price was restlessness and a sense of sexual immaturity that was beginning to nag.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Norman Podhoretz, circa 1971

The piece that truly startled me was not Podhoretz's but a response to it, "Death in the Wilderness," by Harold Rosenberg, who attributed our precociously mature generational style to "ancestor camping." This was the first time I'd come upon the term "camp," and writing with the sharp epigrammatic wit and fresh insights he was known for, Rosenberg made it stick. (Susan Sontag's more notorious "Notes on 'Camp'" came several years later.) Rosenberg's point was that we were not truly a generation; we were the fretful tail end of the previous literary and intellectual generation, having embraced its resolutions of radicalism and bohemianism and modernism as our own without having wrestled with them. We were bringing up the rear, as it were, of what Rosenberg had famously named "the herd of independent minds."

What began to strike home was that our middle-class careerism and domesticity was a costume, what Rosenberg dubbed "The Solid Look." I'd already glimpsed it a bit in Lionel Trilling's example and influence as a tribune of "the educated class" (the middle class with liberal arts degrees and interests). Another of Rosenberg's ideas that I was ready for was that the conformity of our generation was likely on its way out, just as he, a late comer to the independent spirit of the 1920s, had been "swamped" and set on edge by the collectivist spirit of the 1930s. As he went on to say, "younger members of the present generation may be interested in the experience of being 'on edge,' since if my time calculations are correct that is where they are most likely to find themselves."

When I came to New York in the fall of 1960, that edginess was already apparent. I had only to go to the office each morning to sense it, for one of its main agents was Norman himself. He was no longer the spokesman of our sober, mature look, whose wistful suggestion for acting up was a midnight plunge in the Plaza Hotel fountain. No, that Norman was history. In the past year or two he had teamed up with Norman Mailer, the lead rebel, iconoclast and sensualist of the New York scene. The result was a hard-drinking, sexually liberated Norman who didn't seem to spend many evenings at home. Our editorial meetings were often punctuated by phone calls from Mailer, who appeared to have open access to Norman. We always knew it was "the other Norman"—as Sherry referred to him, with her droll roll of the eyes—because the butch side of Norman would emerge as he responded to Mailer's latest brainstorm or piece of gossip or plan for the night's revels.

In New York at the dawn of the '60s, radicalism appeared to be mostly of the cafe type. The first political event I attended was a meeting called by some of the *Paris Review* circle to protest the city law that required entertainers to obtain a license, known as a "cabaret card," to perform in night clubs. Apparently the card of a popular comedian known as Lord Buckley had been revoked, and all of a sudden it became a burning issue. Norman took me along to the organizing meeting of the Citizens' Emergency Committee, which was held in a beer hall near George Plimpton's apartment on the Upper East Side. There were some fifty or sixty people sitting on folding chairs listening to speakers who were trying to dramatize the urgency and implications of the issue, while a list of twenty-one members who were being nominated for the policy committee was circulated. Among the names were Norman Podhoretz; Mark Lane, an outspoken State Assemblyman; Barney Rosset, the aggressively avant-garde publisher of Grove Press; Robert Silvers, then an editor at *Harper's Magazine*, who was chairing the meeting; Art D'Lugoff, whose Village Gate was to New York's nightclubs what the *Village Voice* was to its press; Jules Feiffer, the Hogarth of our age of anxiety; Plimpton, who was slipping among us, happily greeting and introducing; and several white-shoe lawyers and financiers. Philip Rahv, the lion of *Partisan Review*, was not there, and Norman Mailer was coming down from Rhode Island, which was why nothing very much happened for the next hour or so, as a series of speakers preached to the choir.

I was sitting with a small group of Norman's friends, one of whom was William Phillips, the vaunted other editor of *PR* (as I was learning to call *Partisan Review*). A slender man with a handsome head of silvery hair and a face that seemed both relaxed and as alert as a bird's, Phillips had lost his voice and was writing notes to communicate. One of those I passed along said, "This is like *Waiting for Lefty* and Mailer is

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Lefty." Another of his notes was intended for me: "I'd like you to write for us. Can I send you a few novels to review?" Could he ever! I felt like Kafka's K. when, after all that time of dreamily looking for signs, omens, directions and connections, he is suddenly summoned to The Castle.

Phillips's invitation made it a memorable event for me. Mailer never arrived, and in time I had to leave for Riverdale. I don't remember anything much coming of the Citizens' Emergency Committee, which was more like a New York celebrity turn than a response to a genuine political emergency. The real action was taking place a thousand miles away at lunch counters in the South. The Citizens' Emergency Committee was a sign of the times, a kind of false dawn of the decade to come.

The assignment I received from William Phillips was to write a fiction chronicle. I hadn't reviewed more than one book before and here were five, including *The Glass Bees*, by the distinguished and repellent proto-Nazi author Ernst Jünger. But that wasn't the problem; the problem was writing for *Partisan Review*. Whenever I had to write something for publication, I was nagged by a presence—"Look who thinks he's a writer!"—that would undermine whatever confidence I had gained from my previous assignment. Formerly the presence was a generalized one, but now it took on the form of Philip Rahv's stony scowl. There followed a week of writing the first paragraph or two over and over again, hoping for a pass through the mountains to suddenly open. The piece was due on a Monday, and finally around midnight on Sunday I reached the rock bottom of despair and then, having suffered enough, went through my usual routine of telling myself that no matter how bum a critic I was, I wasn't a quitter. Falling back on the boyhood pride that had gotten me through lots of fistfights and lopsided losses in basketball, I stayed up all night and on the dragging wings of nicotine and caffeine, I managed to scribble and revise ten pages, finishing the final version around eleven the following morning.

Reading it on the subway, I was surprised to find I had made an interesting point about Jünger, but without grabbing the reader the way a review by F.W. Dupee or one by Norman usually did. I doubted they would take it.

About an hour later, I handed it to a young woman sitting behind a barrier to the sacred precinct in a loft off Union Square. Crowded as the dark interior was with desks, filing cabinets and bookcases, it seemed as much like a cave as an office. I told her that Mr. Phillips was expecting it and turned to leave. "Wait a minute," a voice rumbled from within, and out of the darkness shambled a broad, dark bear of a man in a pink pinstriped shirt and slicked-down hair.

"I'm Philip Rahv," he said. "Who are you?"

Hardly the person I wanted to see at the moment, already in mental flight from the great opportunity I'd probably blown. Seven or eight years before, I had often stood across the street from this same building in a kind of compulsive reverie, a supplicant before his temple, hoping that I might actually see Isaac Rosenfeld or Delmore Schwartz, my two favorite priests, leave the building, or maybe even Rahv or Phillips, the keepers of the temple, and suddenly I would have the nerve to approach one or the other, tell him how much he and his work mattered to me, and he would take an interest, take me for a cup of coffee, and my empty writer's life would become inhabited by a major mentor and ally. Now the fantasy had come true, and I could hardly bear the reality.

I told him my name and began to explain why I'd written much more about Jünger's novel than the others.

"You're one of Norman's young men," he interrupted, dropping me without much interest into one of the many pigeonholes he kept in his mind. That's how it seemed I had come be regarded. And it rankled.

It roused me enough out of my grim daze to say, "I work at *Commentary*, but I try to be my own man. And I'm in my 30s"—which didn't much register with him. He led me to a desk within the gloom, told me to sit down in a chair on the other side, took the manuscript out of the envelope and began to read. About every minute or so, he'd come out with an "Ugh," the intonations of which progressed in my mind from skepticism to disapproval to disgust. "You really have blown it," I said to myself. "The chance you've been dreaming of for ten years and you've fucking blown it."

His cruelty act finished, Rahv tossed the manuscript into a wire file on the desk and said, "Not bad. But too long."

The drums of hell stopped banging, and my spirit returned to me. I said that I'd be glad to cut it. "How many pages should it run?"

"Nah, I'll cut it," he said, dismissive of the task.

I knew a bit about editing by now, and there suddenly were good things in the review I wanted to preserve. Also I had doubts

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about the editorial sensitivity of someone who would read something with its author sitting right there in the hot seat. "If you'd just mark the places where it needs a trim, I could take it from there."

"No, *I'll* do it," he said, upping the overbearingness a notch. Well, at least some version of it would be in *PR*. My unease about his editing (Rahv's manner reminded me of the line in a Joyce story about a woman who dealt with moral problems like a butcher deals with meat) along with my lingering resentment of the "Norman's young men" comment made me want to just get out of there.

I stood up. So did he. "Come on," he said. "I'll take you to lunch. We'll mark the occasion of your becoming one of our writers."

The piece I published in *Partisan Review* had been cut by Philip Rahv like a butcher cuts meat.

My long-cherished hope sprang up and bloomed. Once again, he was Philip Rahv, not just the editor of *PR* but the author of the seminal "Paleface and Redskin," the critic who wrote as sensitively about Henry James's heroines (I'd cribbed a bit from his introduction to *The Bostonians*) as he did about Raskolnikov and Stavrogin and Ivan Karamazov, the one among the elders who had stood up squarely against Joe McCarthy, calling him a political bum.

I assumed he'd take me to Schwabens, a literary in-place in the Union Square area. But instead he led me into a coffee shop next door, where we sat at the counter. "Take the chopped liver," he said. "It's the specialty here."

My stomach had been up all night and through the morning churning with the rest of me. "I think I'll have some scrambled eggs," I said.

He seemed insulted, as though he'd brought me to a famous steakhouse and I'd turned down the filet mignon for a hamburger.

"You're making a mistake," he grumbled. "The chopped liver is special here. You should try it."

Some occasion, I thought ruefully. I stuck to my choice of eggs and tried to turn the prickly coffee shop gourmand back into the critic I admired. I told him how much I'd learned from his introduction to *The Bostonians* and that I had drawn upon it in my dissertation. He responded by ordering another cup of coffee. I settled for an Alka-Seltzer. "So what's going on with Norman?" he asked with much more emphasis than curiosity.

I'd been at *Commentary* five or six months by now and was bored spitless by the question. So I asked him what he thought was going on with Norman, which probably was what his question was the opening for anyway. "He thinks he's become a major radical. It's like that joke about the rich man who buys a yacht and takes his mother out in it. She asks him who's going to steer it. He says he is. 'I'm a captain now, Mom,' he tells her. She says, 'By you you're a captain. But by the captains are you a captain?'" Rahv then delivered himself of a long rap, the high points being that Norman was essentially an arriviste who was trying to turn himself outside in, that he had no basic ideological position that grasped the social forces today, that he was much more a "political swinger" than he was a radical. He needed to take *Commentary* in a new direction to make his mark, and what direction could he go but left? But it wasn't all that left anyway, and it wouldn't last. He was under the spell of that other "swinger," Mailer, and that wouldn't last either. Norman Podhoretz was too bourgeois.

Rahv's tone, his stance, his linkage brooked little reply. If there was going to be a significant radicalism, he wound up saying, it would come from the campuses. He was teaching at Brandeis now, and he sensed an inchoate restlessness there. "It started with those Negro students, and if we get into a war with Cuba or Vietnam you'll see it spread like wildfire."

Soon after I'd started at *Commentary*, Norman Mailer gave a Saturday night party that ended with him drunk and stabbing his wife, and then staggering off into hiding. The following Monday the office became Mailer Central as Norman received reports about his friend's whereabouts, state of mind, options. After sneaking into his wife's hospital room to beg her not to press charges and the next day appearing on Mike Wallace's talk show, Mailer was arrested, remanded to Bellevue and spent two weeks or so there.

Not long after his release he turned up at a party where I happened to be, and I met him for the first time. I expected him to be chastened by the experience. He entered the party with his entourage, his chest high, his expression exuberant, as though he had been spending his time on the expert slopes at Killington rather than in the city psychiatric ward. Wherever Mailer was became the party. The star of his entourage was the ex-middleweight Roger Donoghue, whose knockout punch had once killed a man. Lithe and ruggedly handsome, he drew my attention away even from Mailer. I thought of Sergius O'Shaugnessy, the narrator of *The Deer Park* and, more recently, the cocksman par excellence of "The Time of Her Time," Mailer's sensationally explicit account of a three-night stand in which the deft, cunning "messiah of the one-night stand" slowly boosts a smartass NYU student up the wall of her semifrigidity and finally over into the promised land.

At one point I was introduced to Mailer. Half smiling, half squinting, he gave me a measuring look, the affable observer who misses nothing. "You've got a pug's nose," he said. "You ever box?"

"Some," I said. He asked me where; I told him mostly in the Navy. "Not competitively," I said. "Mostly self-defense."

"Is that how you got your nose?"

"Sort of. Actually, my nose is a long story," I said, stumbling around, wondering if I should tell the story to him, deciding not to. "But, yes—I did get it broken the second time in a grudge bout in boot camp."

He smiled. "You win?"

"Actually, I did. I was lucky the other guy quit. After three rounds I couldn't hold my arms up anymore."

He nodded. "I know how that feels." Suddenly, he feinted with his hands and mine came up. "Quick hands," he said.

It broke the ice—in me. He was that famous, that charismatic—I'd felt as shy as a girl despite what we were talking about. Still, I was relieved when someone else walked by and I could get out of Mailer's magnetic field, where his words zinged and mine seemed to float as light and evanescent as soap bubbles.

About a year or so later, there came a surprise. I was leaving the building after work when I saw Mailer by himself, trying to hail a cab on Third Avenue during rush hour. I had to look twice to make sure it was him. He was wearing an overcoat and a watch cap pulled over his ears against the cold. He didn't look chesty and keen at all; he looked boyishly oppressed, diminished without his entourage, his face pinched in the cold air.

David Segal was the friend of a young woman I had known during college in Ann Arbor in the early 1950s. A short, pudgy fellow who made up in aggressiveness what he lacked in size, he would go on to have a significant career as a book editor until his untimely death in his early 40s. But when I first knew him he was working in his father's thread business.

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Married to the writer Lore Segal, he moved in Upper West Side literary circles, and our paths crossed one evening at a dinner party. He told me that he was trying to write his way out of the family business, and having spent a good part of my adolescence in my father's plate-glass shop in Elizabeth, New Jersey, I was touched by his situation. He had published a review in *Commonweal*, and I asked him if he wanted to try to write something for *Commentary*. What did I have in mind? I suggested that he look around for a book that really interested him, and if it wasn't already assigned, he could try a review.

I'd been doing this for some time now. Shortly after I'd come to *Commentary*, I'd had a conversation with Norman about recruiting writers for the magazine. It didn't seem to me such a big deal; I said I knew of four or five people at the University of Chicago alone who could write for *Commentary*.

"You think you do, but you don't," said Norman. "You don't realize how unusual you were for an academic."

I said I wasn't that unusual: I'd lucked into an opportunity my friends hadn't had. "I'll bet you a dinner that I can bring five writers you've never heard of into the magazine in the next year."

"I don't want to take your money," he said. "I'll bet you won't bring three."

We turned out to both be right. With one exception, the novelist Thomas Rogers, none of the former colleagues I had in mind sent in a review or piece that was lively enough to be accepted. A former fellow graduate student, Elizabeth Tornquist, who was turning to political journalism, also managed to crack the barrier. The others had fallen into one or another mode of scholarly dullness or pedagogical authority and, despite my suggestions, had trouble climbing out to address the common reader. My efforts to point their prose and sense of subject in a broader direction brought little joy to either party. "How dare you revise my formulation of an intellectual problem" was a fairly typical reaction.

I was still looking for my third winner. David Segal decided to write about contemporary cartoonists: Walt Kelly, Jules Feiffer, Shel Silverstein and Saul Steinberg. David could write: "Steinberg's line is most venomous in his drawings of women; the book swarms with women who wear grotesque faces as if they were the scars of old victories." But at the editorial meeting, his manuscript was judged to be all over the place and lacking a context. I worked on it with David, resubmitted it and was told it still wasn't acceptable. Rather than expose either of us to another bruising bout of editing, I tightened up the prose some more; and since I had room in the next issue for it, I gave it to Sherry. Then I called David and told him the good news, adding that I'd done a bit of last-minute tinkering, which he could check out in the galleys.

He didn't return the galleys, but when the issue appeared he phoned me. Expecting that he was calling to tell me how pleased he was to be in *Commentary*, I said as much, being pleased with myself that we'd brought it off.

"I hated every word of it," he said. "Damn you, Ted, you took what I wrote and made it into something you wrote. You took away any pride I had in writing it. What would you feel like if the same thing had been done to you?"

When I put the receiver down a few moments later, his fury was still blazing into me. I'd tried to explain that the same thing had happened to me, that it had been a learning experience, that we could have revised the galleys. But my words sounded hollow. I tried to work up some anger of my own but was overtaken by shame. He was right. The review I'd published in *PR* had been cut by Rahv like a butcher cuts meat. I'd all but disowned it, and with it the desire to write for *PR*. I thought of the sentence that Norman had dropped into my Golden piece, which had introduced a small worm into the apple of gratification and gratitude. That was nothing compared with what I had done to Segal's review, not to mention more extensive solo "typewriter" jobs.

I'd been editing freely for more than a year now. As Sherry had said, *Commentary* editors had to be presumptuous to publish perhaps half of our writers and maintain the minimum standard of terse, fluent, idiomatic, well-organized prose. Over time my initial concerns about the author's stake in his work had shifted and hardened into my working understanding of "the *Commentary* piece"—a kind of intuition of what belonged in the magazine and what didn't—from the piece as a whole down to a given sentence or metaphor. But was editing in this more or less arbitrary way all that different from the compromises that Richard Yates's Frank Wheeler, in writing serviceable promotional copy, makes in *Revolutionary Road*? Was I becoming an intellectual organization man whose product was "the *Commentary* piece"? ■

The second part of this article will appear in next week's issue.

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BRIGITTE LACOMBE

From left: Raúl Esparza as Charlie Fox, Jeremy Piven as Bobby Gould and Elisabeth Moss as Karen in *Speed-the-Plow*

Hammerheads

by ALISA SOLOMON

Contemporary playwrights seldom become household names in the United States. Yet in the very week in December that the National Endowment for the Arts reported that the country's playgoing audiences had declined from 13.5 percent of the adult population to 9.4 percent since 1992, pundits across the political spectrum were hammering home a point by invoking a dramatist. They were comparing the Senate seat–peddling Illinois governor, Rod Blagojevich, to a character penned by David Mamet.

Even people who'd never seen one of Mamet's plays could be expected to get the joke. The crew-cut, tough-talking author is America's most recognizable living playwright. Ever since Teach, the bullying braggadocio in *American Buffalo* (1975), stormed in from the wings, cursing like a trochaic trucker—"fuckin' Ruthie, fuckin' Ruthie, fuckin' Ruthie"—Mamet has been known as the dramatic poet of the potty mouth.

But it wasn't just Blagojevich's "fuck"-splattered bluster that brought the dramatist to so many commentators' minds. Like the governor, Mamet's best-known characters scheme and scrap and try to game the system, all the while spewing out gusts of hard-won entitlement. Whether the lowlifes of *American Buffalo*, the sleazy real estate hawkers of *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1984) or the slick Hollywood hustlers of *Speed-the-Plow* (1988), Mamet's men are conning for their lives. Not only does it never occur to them that there might be something wrong with stealing, lying or manipulating but they also display their pursuit of lucre as the patriotic flag of manhood and nation. "You know what is free enterprise," Teach explains to his friend in *American Buffalo*. "The freedom…Of the *Individual*…To Embark on Any Fucking Course that he sees fit.… In order to secure his honest chance to make a profit.…The country's *founded* on this, Don." That Teach and Don are talking about burgling a rich guy's collection of rare coins doesn't strike them as overstepping the bounds of an "honest" course. In Mamet's money plays, American capitalism is a polluted but life-sustaining sea where even bottom feeders can act like sharks. And everybody wants to be a hammerhead.

The timing couldn't have seemed more perfect for this season's Broadway revivals of *American Buffalo* and *Speed-the-Plow*. Beyond Blagojevich, the current gallery of scoundrels, scam artists and malfeasants who have crashed the economy after their long speculative joy ride might also have walked right out of Mamet's scripts. I expected to enjoy watching the gladiatorial verbal contests between men whose no-holds-barred ethos had finally been discredited. I didn't. Unlike *Glengarry Glen Ross*, which was revived in 2005 with an excellent production featuring Alan Alda and Liev Schreiber, the revivals of *American Buffalo* and *Speed-the-Plow* generated about as much fizz as the Wall Street happy hour on the day Lehman Brothers went belly up.

The plays have similar structures: two men with different perspectives hatch a plan that a third person interrupts, threatening the success of the scheme and testing the bonds of the men's friendship. A climactic violent outburst brings both plays to their close—resolving *Speed-the-Plow* (a comedy) and leaving *American Buffalo* in an uncertain calm (a would-be tragedy). In *American Buffalo*, Don, believing he's been swindled by a customer who bought a rare nickel from him, plots a retributive burglary—first with Bob, a young ex-junkie whom Don has taken under his wing, and then with Teach, who convinces Don that he'd be a more reliable partner than Bob. They botch the heist before it gets off the ground. *Speed-the-Plow* pits a movie producer, Charlie Fox, against a female office temp for the commercial soul of Charlie's best buddy, the newly promoted studio exec Bobby Gould. The men are about to take a sure blockbuster of a prison movie with a hot star to their higher-up for "greenlighting" when a wager over whether Bobby can get the secretary into bed gives her a night to champion a manuscript Bobby has asked her to read—a pompous tract about the perils of radiation.

In both plays the action is the talking, the patter of the pitch—desperate, insistent speech that seeks to persuade, justify and dominate. Critics who have lauded Mamet for verbal *vérité* are mistaken; the frequent self-interruptions, syntactical burps and constant interjections that insist "I'm telling you" or "That is what I'm saying" point to the lyrical artifice—and the thematic importance—of Mametspeak.

American Buffalo puts the lingo of entrepreneurship in the mouths of petty crooks, suggesting business is theft by other means. "I don't fuck with my business associates," says Teach as he and Don prepare for the burglary. "I am a businessman, I am here to do business, I am here to face facts." *Speed-the-Plow* makes Hollywood vulgarities the text of a profane oratorio: "You can shove good taste up your ass and fart 'The Carnival of Venice.' Good taste will not hack it," says Gould. Performances famously require actors to skate gracefully on the musical sur-

Alisa Solomon teaches at Columbia University's School of Journalism and is the author of Re-Dressing the Canon: Essays on Theater and Gender.

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face of the text and to take daring twists and jumps. The three actors in *American Buffalo*—Cedric the Entertainer, John Leguizamo and Haley Joel Osment—lacked dexterity and sank the play with their sluggishness. The production closed six days after it opened.

Speed-the-Plow, though a lesser play, fares better, thanks especially to Raúl Esparza in a zippy production directed by Neil Pepe. As Charlie, Esparza takes a giddy literal leap in a happy moment, bounding onto a chair, spinning around and hopping down, all in a delicate second. This choreographic bit demonstrates the fine-tuned artifice Esparza brings to the role—a presentational sensibility honed in his previous starring roles in Stephen Sondheim's *Company* and Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming*. He handles the text as deftly. Without ever transgressing the fourth wall, he sputters, shrieks, drops to a gruff register, practically tap-dances the badinage. His partners don't quite keep up. The office temp (played woodenly by Madonna in the original production) is an underwritten part—a plot device, really—and Elisabeth Moss (she's Peggy on *Mad Men*) trots through it gamely but dimly. In the role of Bobby Gould, I saw Jeremy Piven (he's Ari on *Entourage*). He preened and drew on his undeniable presence to assert himself, attacking the language with more robustness than flair for its rude intricacies. He abruptly left the show after eight weeks (claiming fatigue from mercury poisoning) and has been replaced by longtime Mamet hand William H. Macy. After Piven walked out, ticket sales dropped from more than 70 percent capacity to merely 50 percent—celebrity dynamics that underline Mamet's point.

Incompletely equipped as most of these actors were, however, the productions fell flat for bigger reasons: the plays and their relationship to the times. At the moment that Mamet furnishes a handy, popular reference for the Blagojevich scandal, the plays feel obsolete. Like a corporate logo one can easily identify without ever using the product it adorns, Mamet's iconic status seems to have overtaken the work.

Perhaps because theater is the most communal of arts—in its production and consumption—serious dramatists tend to reflect on the national character. Their canonical plays take the country's spiritual temperature, often directly addressing what it means to be American at a given moment. Sometimes, they even announce their panoramic concerns in their titles: Edward Albee, *The American Dream* (1960); Tony Kushner, *Angels in America* (1990); Suzan-Lori Parks, *The America Play* (1994).

Mamet was widely thought to be contributing to this tradition when he burst onto the scene with a play that name-checked the nation. *American Buffalo* premiered at Chicago's Goodman Theatre in 1975 and then moved to Manhattan in early 1976; a new production opened a year later on Broadway (featuring Robert Duvall, Kenneth McMillan and John Savage.) The play's title refers to the nickel Don has sold, its engraved promises of unity and trust shown to be empty slogans. The title also suggests the decimation of a hounded breed—restless creatures that can't survive among the ruthless forces paving the ground beneath them. Don, Teach and Bob came into being in the era of President Gerald Ford: their bewildered stasis was everyone's. (*Speed-the-Plow* is minor Mamet in comparison—a mean-spirited minuet that does not share the tragic ambitions of *American Buffalo*.)

At the time, the boldest theater experimenters were cresting the last waves of the counterculture, breaking down much more than the fourth wall. In New York City, companies like the Open Theater, the Performance Group and Mabou Mines were dissolving—or at least blurring—the boundary between actor and role and exploring new means of dramatic expression through multimedia, ritual or environmental stagings. Director-devisors like Richard Foreman and Robert Wilson were killing off the psychologically motivated character in their (very different) new formalisms. Institutions like La MaMa, the Ridiculous Theatrical Company and the Negro Ensemble Company—in their distinct ways—were challenging longstanding assumptions about the proper shapes and concerns of American drama and establishing new institutional models for presenting it. Performance art was inventing itself as a bold antiart in galleries, garages and public spaces. Plain old commercial plays were still being put on, but nobody much noticed or cared.

Mamet's genius was to fold the findings of the experimental ferment back into conventional form—but with a cantankerous twist. Sexual frankness, general outrage, raw energy, qualms about capitalism and the patchiness of America's promise: all these issues, kept at a rolling boil downtown, simmered pungently in Mamet's work. But they were carefully contained within the walls of narrative realism. And embodied by men. Manly men. Heterosexual men. The mainstream theater establishment was ecstatic. The well-made play had a scrappy new shape and, better still, a new idiom: a heightened language raked up from the gutter and spat out at the world by a dude.

More than that, Mamet was turning out

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to be a dutiful bad boy: stealing Arthur Miller's mantle by turning it inside out, he gratified the commercial as well as the academic contenders eager to crown the Next Important American Playwright. (Things looked so bleak in those days that the Pulitzer board named no drama prize in 1972 or 1974.) Taking up many of Miller's themes—loyalty and betrayal, manhood, the uphill drive toward success, the moral disintegration of the business of America—Mamet drained them of their pathos and sanctimony. He shifted the scene from the home to the workplace, stripping away the domestic concerns of family and love—thereby making women superfluous, except as trophies or plot devices. Where Miller's men desperately seek integrity, plead for absolution and chew themselves up over their inadequacies, Mamet's simply gnaw on one another. Miller's heroes desire material success in order to win approval from their fathers and security for their families. Mamet's just want the dough. Miller moralizes; Mamet sneers.

American Buffalo looks a lot like Miller's *The Price* (1968), with its stage crammed with junk for sale—in both cases, a blunt metaphor for the detritus of a spent American Dream. But the contest in Miller's play, between personal fulfillment and sacrifice for some greater good, goes slack in Mamet's, replaced by the cleaner competition of dog-eat-dog. Similarly, the agon in *All My Sons* (1947)—individual profit versus the obligation to humanity—is replayed in *Speed-the-Plow*, but with profit's triumph providing the happy ending. Mamet's masterpiece, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, inverts Miller's greatest work, *Death of a Salesman*. His mendacious two-hander about sexual harassment, *Oleanna*, rewrites *The Crucible*, turning the female character into both witch hunter (going after a smug but innocent man) and witch (or, in the language of her climactic comeuppance, "cunt").

Miller's plays came to seem stodgy and self-righteous to the generations that followed his first audiences; Mamet's, too, may be dulled by time. Work admired for catching the zeitgeist inevitably reaches a best-before date. *American Buffalo* and *Speed-the-Plow* have not stayed news if only because the self-aggrandizing entrepreneurialism they skewered became the watchword of post-Reagan belief in the "ownership society." From policy to pop culture, the spirit of Teach's paean to free enterprise—critically framed in *American Buffalo*—began to sound like an article of faith in the theology of the unregulated market. The play shows a couple of wannabe crooks who see themselves as the same sort of enterprising mavericks flourishing on Wall Street: the sharp edge of the comparison dulled as everyone was invited—indeed, expected—to jump into the market. Bobby Gould and Charlie Fox chase enthusiastically after blockbuster schlock according to their credo: "*Make the thing everyone made last year*," Gould explains. "It's more than what they want. It is what they require." Shamelessly asserting this credo is no longer pointed—or even funny—in the landscape of *Mad Men* and *Entourage*.

As Mamet's views have become more Manichaean, he has squared the jaws of his tough guys.

This is hardly to say that Mamet will not remain popular. Presented on the country's nonprofit regional stages more often than most of his contemporaries, his plays still have a derivative value. (Edward Albee and the late August Wilson exceed him on that score—but Mamet can boast a few more Facebook fans!) With their big buildings and bloated administrative staffs, regional theaters move with the agility of ocean liners; they are extremely slow to change course. Their audiences are conservative, preferring known names to new ones. Mamet's plays are relatively cheap to produce—small casts, uncomplicated sets. And acted well, they are perfectly entertaining, making it unlikely that they will drop out of circulation anytime soon. (Arthur Miller remains a staple on these stages.)

But Mamet has moved away from the matter of his money plays. Drama is a dialectical art form—we're always aware of character and actor, illusion and reality—and thus lends itself to ambiguity, open questions, critical distance. Mamet seems to have grown allergic to such scrutiny, and *Speed-the-Plow* revealed the first symptom: the radiation book the secretary promotes is so patently ludicrous that the plot strains credibility in favor of ideological deck-stacking. Mamet's condition worsened. In a recent book, *The Wicked Son: Anti-Semitism, Self-Hatred, and the Jews*, he employs tough talk that sounds like self-caricature to denounce secular Jews and criticism of Israel. And last year, in articles in the *Village Voice* and the *New York Times*, Mamet railed against a straw version of liberalism that no liberal I've ever encountered would identify with—as contemptuous of the Constitution, among other things. He still, even now, upholds the market as the best guarantee of freedom against the nefarious powers of the state. (It never occurs to him that the interests of state and market have rather merged in recent years.) As Mamet's views—or at least his public expression of them—have become more conservative and Manichaean, he has squared the jaws of his tough guys and shifted them to the more hospitable precincts of Hollywood, where he has a thriving career as a skillful screenwriter and director. (*Wag the Dog*, *Homicide*, *Redbelt*, *The Unit*, to name just a few.) Machismo plays more smoothly onscreen than onstage, where theater's built-in irony can't help but make us skeptical. For serious drama, Mamet currently prefers the genres that invite the blunt antinomies of his politics.

Mamet's theater work in the 1990s focused more on domestic relationships (for instance, *The Cryptogram*, an elliptical, creepy family drama, and *Boston Marriage*, an arch effort at writing about Victorian women in love). In the twenty-first century, he has taken to writing farces—well-built laugh machines that toothlessly take on topical issues. *Romance* (2005) is a slapstick courtroom comedy in which a madcap trial unleashes slurs against Arabs, gays, Jews, you-name-it, while a Middle East peace conference is under way (unseen) nearby (presumably, a farce of its own). *November* (2008) presents a president with poll numbers "lower than Gandhi's cholesterol" campaigning for re-election during Thanksgiving; he tries to work favor-swapping deals—and, when those fail, blackmail—with the turkey industry and Native Americans, only to find himself outmaneuvered by his lesbian speechwriter, who demands marriage rights.

It would hardly be fair to say that in these recent ventures Mamet is repeating his playwriting history as farce—he has seldom sat in one stylistic spot for long. Still, no matter the genre, questions of power and greed and gullibility stick to his work like gum on a shoe. If *American Buffalo* and *Speed-the-Plow* once revealed a mean current burbling beneath the American mainstream, today's ferocious undertow washes those insights away. Perhaps in another decade or two, a director will come along who will find a means to recalibrate Mamet's work. Just as Simon McBurney blasted away the walls of Miller's *All My Sons* to lend it a surprising mythic dimension in this season's Broadway production, maybe an imaginative new staging will return *American Buffalo*'s bite. For the time being, however, the recently revived Mamet plays show some sleaze but raise no sense of serious threat. Kind of like Rod Blagojevich. ■

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BERKELEY, CALIF., *Nation* discussion group. prehend@gmail.com.

ASHEVILLE, NC, *Nation* discussion group forming. Contact mgibney@unca.edu.

BRENTWOOD, CALIF. New *Nation* discussion group forming. We'd like to start meetings soon. Contact ibhernandez2003@yahoo.com.

THE SPOKANE/INLAND NORTHWEST *Nation* discussion group: Gil Murray, (509) 999-4502; Box 293, Cheney, WA 99004; e-mail: gbmurray2@aol.com.

SANTA CLARA COUNTY, CALIF., *Nation* discussion group meetings are starting up. Please e-mail loisaalbq@yahoo.com.

ORGANIZATIONS

SAN ANTONIO *Nation* discussion group. Second Mondays, Grady's Bar-B-Q at San Pedro and Jackson Keller. Contact lenwheeler@satx.rr.com for more information.

RICHMOND, VA, *Nation* discussion group seeks new members. Contact Wayne Young, (804) 232-8521, youngwayne88838@aol.com.

A NEW *NATION* UTAH YAHOO GROUP has been created at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/thenationutah. To join, contact Sam Evans, (801) 791-8089 or sameritech@yahoo.com.

A NEW MADISON (WIS.) *NATION* DISCUSSION GROUP will be meeting one Sunday afternoon a month. Interested in participating? Contact Helen Aarli, h.aarli@earthlink.net or (608) 244-0787.

BOSTON AREA. *Nation* discussion group seeks new members! Please contact Sam Pilato, sam@alcove.arlington.ma.us, (781) 643-0038.

ROCK HILL/FORT MILL, SC, *Nation* discussion group forming. Contact addgroup@comporium.net.

SANTA CLARA COUNTY, CALIF., *Nation* discussion group meetings are starting up. First meeting date: February 10. E-mail loisaalbq@yahoo.com.

POLITICAL ACTION

***NATION* STUDENT OUTREACH:** Attention student activists! If you're involved in organizing a progressive event, lecture or film festival on your campus or in your community and would like to distribute copies of *The Nation*, please let us know by calling (212) 209-5416.

ONLY AT BACKWARDSBUSH.COM. Count down the days, hours, minutes and seconds until President Obama is sworn in!

POSITIONS AVAILABLE

SOCIAL CHANGE JOBS. Weekly employment bulletin *Changeworks* (v2.0) covers progressive organizations across USA. Free sampling of job listings from latest issues at www.changeworks.org. (866) 276-7201.

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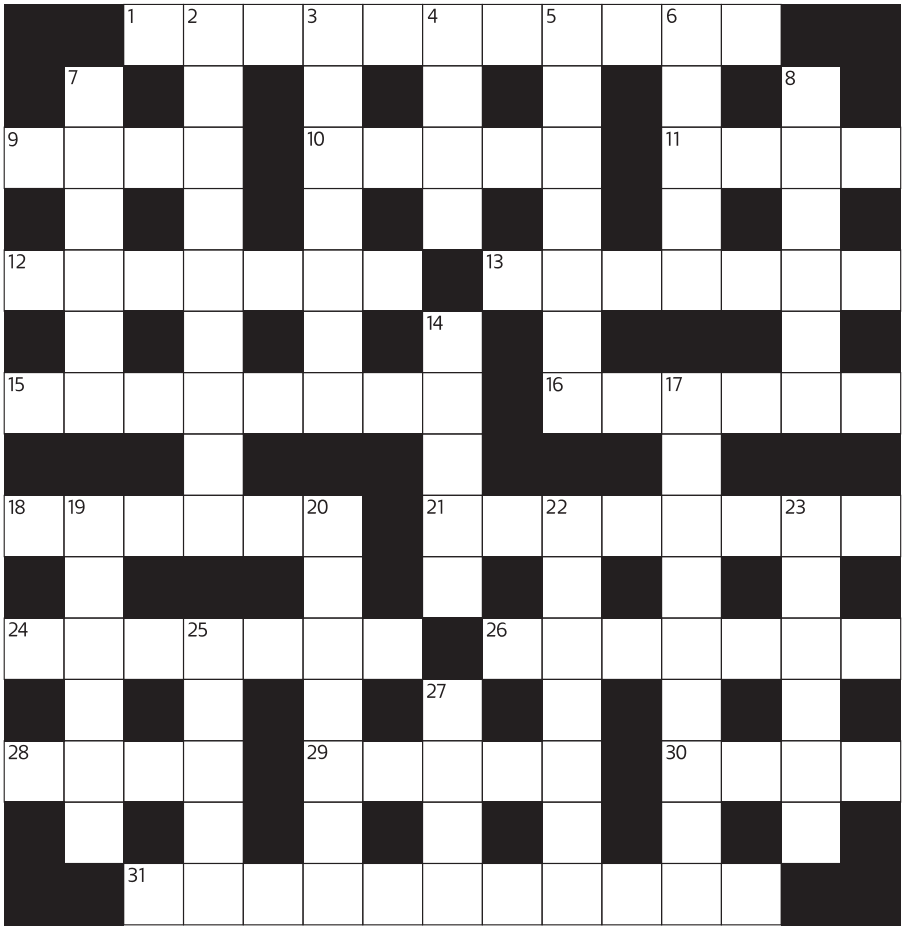
Puzzle No. 3155

FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 Such as "O Death, Where Is Thy Sting!"—signs that such as A or B have moved out. (11)

9 and **10** You might take them when you go abroad, and go by such as 13. (9)

11 How you bring up the issue? In back, too! (4)

12 You may have such a breaker in your house, but it's a roundabout journey to get the answer. (7)

13 It's abbreviated in any writing, at last. (3,4)

15 The words they sing in the Met! (8)

16 What the ball may go over let loose—but you might get stung with it! (6)

18 A private place near a junction. (6)

21 Where you might expect to find a Great Dane—in kennels in Oregon, as you see. (8)

24 A very special drink appeared to go by sea. (7)

26 A place in Canada on a square with bad air and the sound of French water. (7)

28 It may be a trick, but it's sure in bad form! (4)

29 The wizard's home stands before one in the pure, fresh air. (5)

30 Is positioned horizontally, but there's no truth in such! (4)

31 What one might hail with the German steamy environment—but one may be considered a rather stuffy sort! (11)

DOWN

2 What one may do in grocery stores were once used by peddlers. (9)

3 In short, it's a second-year student when it's wrongly applied to mean a person who reasons adroitly and speciously. (7)

4 Well done? Never! (An unusual description!) (4)

5 A classic runner has severe consequence at the old back gate. (7)

6 Certainly not a late Civil War general! (5)

7 Where a famous painter liked to hang out, getting up at the start to find a success with one. (6)

8 What a cop does to the beat? (6)

14 and **27** It might show a distinctive mark of the clan, to start with nothing in the holy spot. (5,4)

17 Arms of a sort, and 10 brings up a pet along with the French…(9)

19 …but the French and a somewhat crippling disease show the team association. (6)

20 Journey over rancid oil comes to shores made famous by fighting men. (7)

22 Sol, and what it does. (Ray might be associated with it.) (7)

23 Complained bitterly—having to get sick while in debt, in a sense. (6)

25 The lady, to a degree, shows where a queen reigned at one time. (5)

27 See 14

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3154

W	H	O	S	N	E	X	T	■	B	A	R	B	E	R
I	■	R	■	O	■	R	■	F	■	N	■	O	■	E
S	I	N	K	S	■	A	R	I	S	T	O	T	L	E
E	■	A	■	T	■	Y	■	N	■	E	■	H	■	N
S	A	M	U	R	A	I	■	I	N	S	T	A	L	L
T	■	E	■	I	■	N	■	S	■	U	■	■	■	I
■	A	N	A	L	O	G	■	H	O	P	P	E	R	S
E	■	I	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	R	■	T
L	A	S	A	G	N	E	■	S	A	S	H	A	Y	■
O	■	■	■	O	■	C	■	E	■	L	■	D	■	S
Q	U	A	R	R	E	L	■	V	I	O	L	I	S	T
U	■	C	■	I	■	A	■	E	■	G	■	C	■	A
E	Q	U	A	L	S	I	G	N	■	G	R	A	S	S
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T	H	E	B	A	N	■	S	H	I	R	K	E	R	S

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Visit the places where art is created and displayed without censorship and celebrate the groups that make it possible

Guerrilla Girls.
A group of artists whose objective it is to rag the art establishment for what they see as its systematic exclusion of women. They don gorilla masks before invading an offending art site. One of their advertising campaigns unmasked the low, low number of women and artists of color in our national art museums. As a result, museums suddenly found works they never knew they owned and displayed them! www.guerrillagirls.com

Your Art Here.
A nonprofit public art project based "on the belief that everyone has the right to 'be the media.'" 1419 S. Washington Street, Bloomington, IN 47401

Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art.
When the historic work *The Dinner Party* created by Judy Chicago and 400 volunteers was originally unveiled in 1979 many critics dismissed it as propaganda. When the monumental installation became homeless, Sackler endowed a permanent refuge for it at the Brooklyn Museum. Brooklyn Museum, 200 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, NY 11238

Edward Koren

Philadelphia Mural Arts Program.
In an interesting experiment, the city of Philadelphia, suffering a graffiti plague in 1984, hired muralist Jane Golden to find the graffiti makers and harness their natural creativity. Her effort evolved into the Mural Arts Program employing about 300 artists a year to complete more than 2,700 murals, making Philly Mural City. Thomas Eakins House, 1729 Mount Vernon Street, Philadelphia, PA 19130

A Short History of Art Censorship in Our Time.
Includes the Subway Kiss-Off, NEA Defunds Smut, Boobs on the Tube, Don't Monkey with W, Who Flung the Dung?. See p. 32-33.

Find more in ***THE NATION GUIDE TO THE NATION*, your guide to the left in America from *The Nation* Magazine, America's biggest and leading political and cultural weekly. Telling the world since 1865.** By Richard Lingeman and the Editors of *The Nation*. Introduction by Victor Navasky and Katrina vanden Heuvel. Original Drawings by Edward Koren

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